JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION is a refereed publication for the academic exploration of the task of religious education in modern society. The journal helps disseminate original writings and research in religious education and catechesis -- and in related areas such as spirituality, theology, moral and faith development, cultural contexts, ministry and schooling. It includes a variety of feature sections -- on contemporary educational issues, book reviews, conferences, resources and practical hints for teachers. Articles for publication on religious education in various contexts and on the related areas noted above, as well as on any of the feature sections are welcome. See the inside back cover for details.

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**JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Incorporating

**WORD IN LIFE** (1978-1998)

**OUR APOSTOLATE** (1952-1977)

Published by the School of Religious Education

**Australian Catholic University**
EDITORIAL

As I sit down to write the editorial for this issue I find myself reflecting on the past four months as I have travelled, attended conferences, presented papers, and engaged in passionate discussions with colleagues from many parts of the world. One common theme that has emerged, time and again, is the attention that is being given to the role of religion in social and political life. An associated factor is the acknowledgement of the pressing need in the contemporary world to learn about and understand different religions as a means to promoting intercultural harmony and social cohesion. This, of course, is of particular significance in Europe where old countries which have developed particular world views for decades are now experiencing rapid changes to their social and cultural structures as immigrants and other new arrivals have begun to settle within their communities. Accordingly, on all sides I have been hearing discussions about integration and intercultural education, and encompassed within these broad areas are strands of religious education, religion studies and interreligious education. A positive element that has resulted from these concerns about integration and intercultural education is the increased interest in exploring different approaches to a study of religion or religious education as well as the funding of research projects that are focused on different aspects of religious education.

Unfortunately, this interest has not yet spread to Australia in quite the same way. And yet, given some of the social and cultural issues related to religious divisiveness that have occurred in recent years across the world, and that have been mirrored in Australia, it would certainly seem that education about religions ought to be on the agenda for curriculum development and for research grants, not just in connection with students in faith-based schools but for all Australian students.

As we move towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Australia has clearly become a multi-religious nation and while, perhaps, the mainstream Christian churches may be experiencing dwindling numbers, some of the other religious communities have been increasing their numbers. In such a context, it is essential that research is carried out to enhance the delivery of religious education and to consider ways in which these programs may promote a genuine understanding of religious diversity. Since religious education in Australia is, for the most part, restricted to faith based schools, it is most encouraging to find a constant stream of researchers who are endeavouring to increase their knowledge about the discipline and to discover new and innovative ways whereby professional practice can become more effective.

The articles that appear in this issue provide such a focus. They range from an examination of Church documents to a discussion of the response of Church schools to the contexts in which they find themselves today and the consequences that this may have for the religious education programs they offer. In particular, this issue of the journal presents research studies that focus on Catholic schools in the Australian, Canadian and Irish contexts and they highlight the fact that there are similarities in the issues that these schools need to address; as well, they raise further questions about different aspects of the religious education programs that Catholic schools need to offer if they are to respond to the pluralist nature of contemporary society. Further, they highlight the importance of striving to develop religious education programs that are relevant to the context of students’ lives.

Marian de Souza
Editor

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL HARMONY AND SOCIAL COHESION

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From the Vatican to the classroom PART 2: examining intertextuality and alignment among Church, local diocesan and school religious education documents

Abstract
“Contemporary educational practice is saturated with texts...” (Freebody, 2003, p. 204) They inform, guide and shape policy, procedures and practices within schools both systemically and locally. Religious education is filled with such texts: Church and diocesan policy documents, curriculum documents and classroom religion programs. But to what extent are these documents aligned with each other? Does the classroom religion program reflect diocesan curriculum documents and policy and in turn, do diocesan policies and curriculum documents authentically translate official Church policy? This presentation demonstrates how an analysis of the crafted language in educational texts can reveal how that text both reflects and constructs a particular reality. What messages are conveyed? Do the documents in fact say what the authors intend? Do they relate to, and support, other relevant documents? Systemic Functional Linguistics is a rigorous analytic tool that affords clear insights into the crafted language of educational texts. As one way of portraying the usefulness of such a tool in gaining insights into how language constructs particular messages, this presentation will exemplify what it reveals about the conveyed experiences and realities among Church, diocesan and school religious education documents.

Discussion of Findings - Church Documents
Both Church documents state that religious education in the Catholic school comprises two processes: (1) religious instruction, and (2) catechesis. However, both also emphasise these two processes distinct but at the same time complement each other. Two further aspects are also made clear in both documents: first, religious instruction is the work of the school, as it is not linked to either the family or the parish; and second, religious instruction for the most part is an academic, educational process. In saying this though, the General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997) presents a clearer understanding of religious instruction than was presented in the earlier 1988 document The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education), as it directly assigns agency to religious instruction. It explicitly describes and qualifies its nature and purpose by linking academic and educational attributes directly with religious instruction.

The relationship between catechesis and religious instruction is articulated explicitly in both documents: they are each distinct but at the same time complementary. The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988) refers to this complementarity in terms of students’ own faith, indicating that for believing students religious instruction will strengthen their faith, just as at the same time their knowledge of the faith is increased by catechesis. The General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997) goes further than this, suggesting that religious instruction’s confessional character (¶74) is dependent on how the message is received and responded to by students. To educate is clearly the role of the school. However, the school is also required to play its part in the work...
of catechesis, but how it is to achieve this remains ambiguous. Overall though, according to both documents, religious instruction is the prime responsibility of the school, and catechesis the prime responsibility of the parish.

Part 2 now concludes our examination of the intertextuality and alignment among Church, local diocesan and school religious education documents. In this second part of the topic, the focus shifts to the local level in which diocesan and school documents concerned with religious education are analysed to ascertain their conveyed meanings, and a process to assist in the construction of more clear text is also suggested.

**Analysing Diocesan and School Documents**

Ideally, school religion programs reflect diocesan religious education policy and curriculum documents, which in turn are shaped and guided by relevant Church documents, such as those analysed in Part 1. The following process adapted from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) analysis used previously, offers a way that allows those who formulate policy to both construct, and then evaluate, the conveyed meanings in their texts. In terms of religious education in Catholic schools, the key considerations are: what is to be done, who is to do it, and to whom is it done. The process involves the following basic steps:

1. Examine who and what participants are placed in the foregrounded agent positions of the text;
2. Focus on the processes and circumstances with which the foregrounded agents are linked; and
3. Examine what participants are in recipient positions noting what is being done to them by whom.

These steps are exemplified in a brief example of the data collected from a document that formed part of a wider study (Grajczonek, 2006). It is to be noted that this document is no longer relevant as circumstances for its implementation have changed. Nevertheless, it is a good example to use for this purpose, as it provides some insights into how key people and activities can be positioned within policy, in terms of two essential questions:

- first, to what extent do the constructions of both people and activities in documents convey either clear or ambiguous meanings; and
- second, to what extent do such conveyed constructions/meanings align with other related documents?

**Step 1: Who and what participants are in the foregrounded agent positions?**

In this first step the foregrounded agents and their associated processes are listed as shown in Table 1. Such a table enables an overview of the document’s field. Of the twenty-eight participants that are in the foregrounded agent position, fifteen are human or institutions, such as parish and school, which represent collections of humans. The remaining thirteen participants are abstractions and nominalisations (Collerson, 1994), such as preschool learning, preschool environment, Catholic atmosphere, factors and so on.

An initial point of interest to be noted regarding this document is the number of different terms that are used rather than religious education. Such terms include: religious development, spiritual development, spirituality, religious literacy, but none in the foregrounded agency position.
The document describes the roles of the key participants in relation to “the religious development of the child”. As indicated in Table 2, the teacher is clearly a significant person in the preschool. Whilst it is noted that this document focused on other persons, given the scope of this participants are assigned agency in this statement? Table 2 lists the frequency of the fifteen human participants listed as foregrounded agents.

**Table 2: Frequency of Foregrounded Agents**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Numerical Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher, Principal &amp; APRE/REC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
paper the following examples focus primarily on the role of the teacher and in a minor way the roles of children. One way of deciding on the level of clarity of a document’s conveyed meaning, is to consider two essential questions:

i. to what extent do the constructions of both people and activities in documents convey either clear or ambiguous meanings; and

ii. to what extent do such conveyed constructions/meanings align with other related documents?

Let us analyse how the classroom teacher is positioned in the following sections of this policy. We do this by focusing on the processes and circumstances with which teachers are linked.

Step 2: With what processes and circumstances are the foregrounded agents linked?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Role of the Teacher in the Religious Development of the Preschool Child</th>
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<td>The teacher’s personal faith, principles, Christian values and beliefs are an important model for the spiritual development of the child, evident in the teacher’s attitude of reverence for life and activated primarily in informal ways. While maintaining professional competence through opportunities for professional and personal development in areas including spirituality and religious education, the teacher actively fosters the notion of a loving and caring God through the development of a welcoming and respectful Catholic Christian learning community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher nurtures the spiritual development of the child through establishing and maintaining effective relationships and collaborative partnerships with the children, parents, families, centre staff, school and parish community. The teacher actively supports the family’s role as the primary faith educators of their children, while maintaining the ethos of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher strives to align professional practices with Christian values. This occurs primarily through the respect and understanding the teacher develops for each child as a complex individual within a community of learners. It also occurs through the development of a shared vocabulary, shared understanding and a shared vision. (p. 11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And further on in the document under the section, “The Role of the School in the Development of the Child”:

| The teacher strives towards establishing mutual links with the APRE, working collaboratively with him/her in the implementation of the preschool religious education program. The preschool teacher, principal and APRE discuss the participation and involvement of preschool children in various liturgies and celebrations during the course of the school year. |

In this step then, we first note where the teacher is positioned as the foregrounded agent, and in that position what is he/she doing. Table 3 outlines the processes and circumstances with which the teacher is associated.
Table 3: The Teacher’s Associated Processes & Circumstances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>PROCESS TYPE</th>
<th>CIRCUMSTANCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher’s personal faith, principles, Christian values and beliefs</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>relational - attribution</td>
<td>an important model for the spiritual development of the child, evident in the teacher’s attitude of reverence for life and activated primarily in informal ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the teacher</td>
<td>(actively) fosters</td>
<td>material - action</td>
<td>the notion of a loving and caring God through the development of a welcoming and respectful Catholic Christian learning community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher</td>
<td>Nurtures… establishing and maintaining</td>
<td>material - action</td>
<td>the spiritual development of the child through establishing and maintaining effective relationships and collaborative partnerships with the children, parents, families, centre staff, school and parish community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher</td>
<td>(actively) supports</td>
<td>material - action</td>
<td>the family’s role as the primary faith educators of their children, while maintaining the ethos of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher</td>
<td>strives to align</td>
<td>material - action</td>
<td>professional practices with Christian values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This</td>
<td>occurs</td>
<td>behavioural</td>
<td>primarily through the respect and understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the teacher</td>
<td>develops</td>
<td>behavioural</td>
<td>for each child as a complex individual within a community of learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>is also available</td>
<td>relational - attribution</td>
<td>for teachers and parents, primarily through the role of the Principal and the APRE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher</td>
<td>strives towards establishing, working collaboratively</td>
<td>material – action</td>
<td>mutual links with the APRE, with him/her in the implementation of the preschool religious education program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The preschool teacher, principal and APRE</td>
<td>discuss</td>
<td>verbal</td>
<td>the participation and involvement of preschool children in various liturgies and celebrations during the course of the school year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlighting and separating specific elements in a document affords clearer insights into how those elements, whether people or activities are constructed by the text. Once separated from other participants, the role of the teacher in this document becomes clear. The teacher, when in the foregrounded agent position, is associated with mostly material processes of action: “actively fosters the notion of a loving and caring God”, “nurtures the spiritual development of the child”, “actively supports the family’s role”, “strives to align professional practices with Christian values”, “strives towards establishing mutual links with the APRE working collaboratively with him/her in the implementation of the preschool religious education program.” What is significant here is that a closer examination of these circumstances reveals that they are faith related; not one of them is an educational activity. Whilst two educational circumstances, “the XXXX Religious Education Guidelines provides direction regarding the development of children’s religious literacy” and “in the preschool years this is fostered through introductory exposure and immersion in areas including the following…”, are inserted into the policy, the teacher is not the
foregrounded agent in either activity. The teacher’s responsibility in fostering children’s religious literacy is implied but it is not explicitly stated.

Later in the document, the teacher, along with the APRE, is more explicitly charged with an educational activity, “working collaboratively with him/her in the implementation of the preschool religious education program.” Other aspects of this collaboration include: “The preschool teacher, Principal and APRE discuss the participation and involvement of the child in various liturgies and celebrations during the course of the school year”, which is in the faith dimension of religious education.

The most significant aspect of this document, highlighted by the SFL analysis, is that teachers are never directly engaged in any material action processes to do with the development of educational outcomes, that is, religious literacy or religious instruction. The function of the language indicates that the interpersonal function focuses on teachers, the school, family and the parish and the ideational function is within preschool learning, more specifically religious education within the faith dimension. There is no human foregrounded agent engaged in any active process of developing children’s religious literacy, which is the educational aspect of religious education. The only reference to religious literacy was that the “XXXX Religious Education Curriculum Guidelines provides direction in the development of children’s religious literacy.”

The dilemma for teachers is that it is stated in the document “Religious Education in Preschools”, that children’s religious literacy is to be fostered, but teachers’ roles in this requirement are not articulated. The SFL analysis of these paragraphs shows that the responsibilities of the teacher are more to do with fostering faith development, placing the teachers’ activities in the faith dimension of religious education, indicating that this section of the document promotes and supports a catechetical approach rather than an educational one. However, this is not in line with the Church documents, The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988) and the General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997), both of which, whilst they do not specify the teacher, do clearly place the school and school’s directors central tasks within religious education as implementing the academic classroom religion program. Further, these conveyed realities contradict the diocesan religious education guidelines, which explicitly state that the classroom religion program is underpinned by an educational outcomes-based approach, the aim of which is to develop students’ religious literacy. On the one hand, this document requires that children’s religious literacy be fostered, but on the other, teachers’ roles in this development are unclear. Billig (as cited in Gill, 1996) argues that it is not only what is stated that is critical, but also what is not said is as equally critical (p.146). The roles of the teachers as shown by SFL are more concerned with the spiritual development of the children, rather than their religious literacy.

Step 3: What participants are in recipient positions - what is being done to them by whom?
In this third step then, we examine those participants that are placed in the passive voice or the recipient position paying attention to what is being done to them and by whom. In order to exemplify the crucial nature of where key participants are positioned, let us also examine some ways that students have been positioned in this document.

Within XXX the preschool environment presumes an all-encompassing Catholic atmosphere that supports and nurtures the spiritual development of children. It has an open, welcoming atmosphere where children are guided in understanding the uniqueness and centrality of God in their lives.

In the introduction of this document children are placed in the passive voice, that is, they are acted upon: “children are guided in understanding the uniqueness and centrality of God in their lives” by “an all-encompassing Catholic atmosphere”. Later in the document, both the children and their parents are placed into the passive voice: “parents are encouraged to initiate their children into the parish worshipping community”. The children are being acted upon by their parents, but who is acting upon the parents has not been made clear. It is significant that an agentless passive, which functions “to avoid mentioning the agent – perhaps because it is unknown or can be taken for
granted or perhaps because it is being concealed” (Collerson, 1994, pp. 51-52) has been utilised in this statement. The agentless passive makes ambiguous the issue of whose responsibility it is to encourage parents to take their children to mass: teachers, principal, or APRE. Also this same statement is an intriguing directive to parents, as in the previous paragraph it was clearly stated: “consideration and respect needs [sic] to be given to the fact that there is a wide diversity in the faith lives of families.” On the one hand the document acknowledges that families come from diverse background. On the other hand however, the document presumes that families belong to the local parish faith community. This presumption contradicts how students are viewed in the document General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997) in which students are referred to as believers, searchers and non-believers and it is made quite clear that their religious backgrounds are to be respected (¶ 75).

Throughout this entire document children are placed into the foregrounded agent position twice as shown in the following extracts:

The child experiences God through the events of everyday living within the family, community and preschool environments.

Whilst acknowledging that preschool children develop their religious self at varying rates and in different ways, the child’s spiritual development must be considered in relation to real life events within their family life and preschool experiences.

So for the most part children in this document are constructed as recipients, subject to the school, teachers, parents and the parish. They are also associated with circumstances that seek to develop their faith, more than their religious literacy, and further, except for one instance, children and their families are presumed to be members of the local parish community.

Finally then, when all three steps have been worked through, to what extent this document reflects Church documents can be determined. The specific extracts that focused on teachers and children analysed in this document indicate that religious education in the Catholic preschool was mainly the work of the teachers whose roles were predominantly associated with the faith dimension of religious education, rather than the educational one. The educational nature of religious education received minimal attention. The analysis of this revealed that the preschool approach to religious education was a catechetical one in which the overriding concern was with children’s faith development. Further, children for the most part were constructed as members of the Catholic religion whose religious development featured more than their religious literacy.

In these respects, this document did not align with the directives set out in the Church documents, Religious Education, 1988) and the General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997). Religious instruction is the central concern of the school and by implication, teachers. Whilst the Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) made it explicitly clear that the school “can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis” (¶ 69), it also made it quite clear that the classroom religion program is an educational activity central and specific to the school. In other words, the classroom religion program is the school’s core business. Diocesan documents impact on teachers in Catholic schools more so than Church documents. However, in this case the diocesan documents presented competing views, which seemed also to place teachers in ambiguous positions in that this policy promoted a catechetical approach to religious education and the curriculum presented an educational one.

Conclusion
Educational policies and documents are essential to educational practice (Freebody, 2003). They convey a myriad of directives and messages that are intended to ‘keep the wheels of education’ in motion; practice is informed by policy. It is therefore critical that the particular versions (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004; Gill, 1996) conveyed by policy:

1. authentically reflect and present the essence of significant informing documents;
2. convey the authors’ intended messages clearly and unambiguously to all key stakeholders; and,
3. present consistent messages throughout the document.

Religious education is unique within the Catholic school, as its parameters go beyond diocesan and national concerns; the universal Church also informs and shapes religious education. Teachers’ classroom religion programs are not isolated documents; ideally they should align with, and reflect school, diocesan and Vatican policy and practice. This places significant responsibility upon diocesan policy and curriculum designers to ensure that documents, which inform teachers’ programs and pedagogies, do in fact present clear, correct and consistent versions.

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Dr. Jan Gracjzonek is a lecturer in the School of Religious Education, McAuley Campus, Queensland
LEADING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN AN ERA OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Abstract
In 2001 Brisbane Catholic Education opened its first ecumenical school at Gaven in a major growth area in the Gold Coast corridor. Three more schools have followed. All arose from requests from the local community in major growth areas. There was already significant co-operative work taking place among faith groups in the provision of services to their communities. In each case the initial request was supported by the leaders of these churches in the Brisbane region. The expertise and infrastructure of Catholic Education was then used to bring the proposal to reality.

This paper outlines the philosophy of these schools. Their development poses questions for those who lead Catholic schools in more traditional frameworks. Is there a need for more intentional and clear enrolment and religious education policies that provide for a more traditional Catholic approach? Alternatively, should school leaders look to define an intentional religious education and pastoral program that first seeks to understand the religious and family background of students and to intentionally address their issues as part of its overall school program?

In late 1998 two parish priests in the Brisbane Archdiocese approached the newly appointed Executive Director of Catholic Education seeking support for the establishment of new schools within their parishes. Both parishes were in areas of rapid growth and had limited resources themselves to finance school development. What they sought from the Education office was the support of the office, and hence the Archbishop, in taking financial and administrative responsibility for the schools while ensuring the pastoral links to the parish communities were maintained and, as far as possible, strengthened.

What made this particular approach different was the vision of the priests that they continue to co-operate pastorally with the leaders of other Christian churches in their areas. These were also struggling to provide care and community for an exploding population on the outskirts of the city. The local churches had worked together to share pastoral services in numerous other ways and now they wished to co-operate in educational provision.

This paper will outline the history of these initiatives and the issues that needed to be faced to bring the projects to reality. Fortunately, in taking on this challenge the Archdiocese and Education office were supported by Archbishop Bathersby’s personal commitment to ecumenism. His record was exemplary. As a member of the International Catholic-Methodist Dialogue from 1989-1995, Co-Chairman of the Australian Catholic-Uniting Church Dialogue in July 1997 and President of the National Council of Churches in Australia, the Archbishop already had significant credentials in being able to take forward the ecumenical dialogue. He has continued to do so since 2001 as the Co-Chair of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Working Group.

In response to the request from local church groups and a briefing by the Executive Director of Catholic Education the Archbishop then wrote formally to the leaders of the relevant churches in the Brisbane region seeking their support for the establishment of an ecumenical school. The proposal was to use the expertise and infrastructure already available through Catholic Education to develop a school that would have pastoral involvement from a number of local Christian churches. Although there was no formal agreement entered into at a leadership level, the support of leaders of Brisbane churches would ensure, as far as possible, continuity of pastoral leadership at the local level. Local churches were thus empowered to enter into their own pastoral agreements formalising their involvement in the proposed school.

Brisbane Archdiocese began the first two schools, Jubilee Primary at Gaven (P-7, opened 2001) and
Having accepted the risk of opening a new school, including financial responsibility for land purchase, buildings, future debts and employment of staff the Catholic Archdiocese through its Education office had only begun to resolve the problems of these developments. The way in which an “ecumenical” school owned and operated by the Catholic church would operate and serve its various local church populations was still to be defined.

The Catholic perspective on ecumenical schools
Foundation Vatican documents on both ecumenism and Catholic schools should have provided a major resource in planning for ecumenical school development. Unfortunately, the major documents on ecumenism make no mention of Catholic schools. On the other hand, the documents on the Catholic school make no specific mention of its possible ecumenical nature. Thus the project of beginning an ecumenical school administered by the Catholic church was breaking new ground.

While recognising that the intent of the church documents referenced in the following two sections was not in any way intended to define ecumenical schooling, it is useful, nonetheless, to look at the way in which they present ecumenism and Catholic schooling. This at least provides a framework for the Brisbane document on ecumenical schooling (Catholic Education Council and Commission for Ecumenism, 1997) and its subsequent application to an actual school environment.

Ecumenism
Cardinal Walter Kaspar (2004) in his intervention on the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of the conciliar decree on ecumenism made the point that the Council wished to do justice to the fact that outside of the Catholic church, which had been proclaimed in earlier in encyclicals as the church of Christ Jesus, there were to be found “not only individual Christians but also “elements of the church””. He saw these churches and communities as belonging properly to the one true church, although not in full communion with it, and possessing “salvatory significance” for their members. The church of Jesus Christ is effectively present, although not completely so, in these other churches, according to Kaspar’s interpretation of the Vatican documents.

Dominus Jesus (2000) is the most recent document on the Catholic commitment to ecumenism and, despite a somewhat bad press upon its publication, emphasises this communion of churches. Those baptised in non-Catholic Christian communities are “in a certain communion with the church” (17). Ut Unum Sint (1995) also states clearly that “the elements of sanctification and truth present in the other Christian communities” (11) constitute a communion between these churches and the Catholic church. Can this communion be made real within a school community under the auspices of the Catholic church?

Indeed, one part of Ut Unum Sint (1995) almost challenges us to do so. It makes the point strongly (31) that ecumenism is not only the responsibility of the Vatican but “also the duty of individual local or particular churches”. While it does not specify education as one way to engage in this dialogue, it certainly raises the question as to whether we are limited only to special prayer services or whether we can actually put into practice the call of each person’s Baptism to celebrate together, form community and evangelise by spreading the good news to the world.

The closest that Vatican documents come to defining the way this might happen in an educational setting is in the Vatican’s Directory for the application of principles and norms on ecumenism (1993) which relates specifically only to higher education. However, in looking at the ecumenical aspect present in all theological teaching in higher education, the document provides some grounding for what actually happened in the foundation of ecumenical schools in the Brisbane Archdiocese. It calls for collaboration in “areas of common work for social justice, economic development, and progress in health and education”. (50, 8)

The Directory (1993) points out that Christians are called to meet “in practical forms of co-operation and in theological dialogue”. (19) This is intended to also stimulate a wider discussion and more profound understanding. In the early days of planning the religious education curriculum the pastors decided that, at the appropriate time and at the appropriate age level, the differences in doctrinal interpretation among the churches should be consciously taught and explained. This appeared to be in line with the intention of the Vatican document, albeit in a higher education rather than a school context.

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The Catholic School
To look for definition of ecumenical school development within the church documents on the Catholic school provides an even more difficult challenge than searching the documents on ecumenism. There appears to be no direct reference to ecumenism in any of the documents.

The document “The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium” (1997/2004) comes close to such a reference in defining the Catholic school as a “school for all” (15) but the context in which this statement is made is one of providing an education for all, despite their material poverty. The document also recognises that spiritual poverty is a reality in many parts of the world and there is openness to the concept of a Catholic school addressing this.

Chambers, Grajzonek and Ryan (2006) examine official church documents on the Catholic school and the presence and status of non-Catholic enrolments in Catholic schools. They detect a softening in the tone of the documents over time. Although the presence of non-Catholics in the Catholic school is positively affirmed in all of the documents they reference, they believe the extent of the welcome has expanded in the later documents. They identify a significant shift in tone in 1988 where for the first time in the document The religious dimension of education in a catholic school there is formal recognition that students in Catholic schools might come from very different ideological backgrounds. This appears to include even non-Christian students and, although not advocating ecumenism per se, it does at least provide a basis to assume that non-Catholics are not necessarily present in the schools only to be proselytised.

The General Directory of Catechesis (1998) recognises two classes of students in Catholic schools. They are a mixture of those who attend for religious reasons and those who attend because of the quality of education provided. However, Chambers et al. (2006) also point out that the Third Millennium document (1997/2004) implies that this second group is welcome only when they “appreciate and share its qualified educational project” (16).

Thus while ecumenism as such is not addressed directly in documents on the Catholic school it does appear from this analysis that the church recognises and accepts the presence of non-Catholics in schools administered by the Catholic church. The documents also seem to recognise that conversion is not the sole aim of enrolling these non-Catholic students in Catholic schools. This at least opens the door to considering a school that sets out intentionally not only to enrol those of other faiths but to consciously work to strengthen and grow these students in their own faith and to provide the instruction and pastoral care that is linked to this.

Defining the Ecumenical School
In the absence of church documents that specifically define the ecumenical school from a Catholic perspective, the Catholic Education Council (CEC) and the Commission for Ecumenism (1997) had jointly developed a document within the Archdiocese of Brisbane on “The Catholic Perspective in Ecumenical Schools”. They had significant theological advice in this from Bishop Michael Putney. This was apparently intended to be the first of two documents, the second defining the way in which Catholic schools could address the needs of committed Christian (note, not necessarily Catholic) students in Catholic schools. Unfortunately, the second document was never written. The first, however, did provide the basis for the development of ecumenical schools in the Brisbane Archdiocese under the administrative umbrella of Catholic Education.

Theory into practice
The development of the three ecumenical schools in Brisbane Archdiocese arose first from local community requests and via a direct approach from the parish priest. Each community had already been working together among its pastors in an ecumenical capacity and wished to continue this by developing education provision. Each school community spent a minimum of twelve months and often longer developing their personal vision for their school. This was defined in an education brief that recorded the community vision for a range of attributes including the ethos and values, religious aspects, curriculum, learning environment, pastoral support and the organisation and structure of the school before moving on to comment upon the physical layout.

Since the model for development of these ecumenical schools followed closely the CEC (1997) model, it is appropriate to look at the document headings and the way in which the education briefs addressed these as they began to form an institution that needed to be invented from the ground up.
Ethos
The CEC (1997) defined the vision for an ecumenical school community so well that all of the education briefs (1999, 2000, 2004) in each of the communities all begin with the same quote:

“In an ecumenical school the ethos, the lived expression of the school community’s shared core values and beliefs, would be shaped by the collaborative spirit of all involved in the school. A special contribution to the ethos of the school would come from the traditions of the participating churches, and their effort to journey towards the unity Christ desired for all. In this way the ethos would be characterised by personal and communal prayer, reconciliation, openness to the spirit’s gifted unity, and by love which underpins every effort to build and celebrate relationships in the school and its community.” (P. 4)

An important aspect of the ecumenical dialogue, affirmed in Ut Unum Sint (1995) is to recognise the “endowments present among other Christians”. When this is done we become aware not only of our differences, but the richness of our own traditions. For instance, early in our dialogue in each community it became apparent that some symbols usually incorporated in Catholic school buildings were not acceptable to other Christian communities. The crucifix was one such. The Uniting Church participants pointed out that while a cross was acceptable, the image of a suffering Jesus was not.

In practice, the school designs incorporated only simple, mutually acceptable Christian images. Pictures of the Sacred Heart are not to be found in these schools. When writing the education brief for Jubilee (1999) it was agreed, one suspects as a practical measure to allow the group to move on, that “further discussion needs to occur regarding images and symbols ….. to be incorporated in the school design or artefacts”.

Religious Education

“Religious Education within an ecumenical school will have Jesus Christ at its heart …. It will give special attention to the study of ecumenism …. historical moments of indifferences have emerged …….. events influencing relationships between the churches which have given rise to modern ecumenical movements.” (P. 9)

The Brisbane Catholic Education Guidelines for Religious Education organise content in four strands.

Scripture
Understanding the Bible
Using the Bible
Beliefs
Human Existence
Understanding God
The Mystery of Christ
Church/Kingdom

Celebration and Prayer
Sacraments
Spirituality
Morality
Foundations
Moral Life
Social Teachings of the Church

Of these four strands it was only the section in Celebration and Prayer, in particular that on “Sacraments”, that caused any concern among the Pastors as they looked at what would be taught to young people at a school level. There are probably challenges to come. For instance, in the early years the scripture content labelled “Key People in Stories” is intended to be complemented by a history of the parish community and family. This is relatively easy to achieve, given the various
community backgrounds involved in ecumenical schools. It is less simple in Years 4 to 5 where the Gospel of Luke as a centre for scripture study is intended to be complemented by a history of the diocese and in Years 6/7 where scripture study is complemented by a history of “the church” in Australia. The question is: “which church?” It was recognised that the way in which an ecumenical school would actually take these complementary topics forward would be challenging. It will be more challenging as the secondary schools progress into Years 9 and 10 when the Reformation is covered. However, it was perceived by the Pastors to be not contentious and reasonably achievable provided that emphasis on the sacramental program was deleted from the syllabus.

It is the policy of the Brisbane Catholic Archdiocese that sacraments of Initiation are the responsibility of the local parish community. The other participating churches also followed this practice. This made it relatively easy to plan the religious education program in each school. The need for involved theological explanations of differing approaches to Baptism and First Communion, let alone Reconciliation was thus avoided. This led to acceptance by all churches that “the guidelines for religious education (R.E.) of the Catholic Archdiocese will provide the foundational framework”. The pastors themselves were most impressed by an R.E. program that was supported by the appointment of an Assistant Principal – Religious Education and delivered daily in every classroom. It was something beyond the experience of the non-Catholic church leaders.

Worship provided a challenge and a set of different proposed solutions for each community. The Jubilee community were comfortable with Eucharist being celebrated together, led by any one of the participating pastors. At Jubilee the vision was that they would ensure there was instruction beforehand on “the policies and traditions of participating churches and their approach to shared Eucharist”.

All churches involved in all schools shared a Eucharistic tradition. However, the Emmaus and Unity communities tended to emphasise celebration of the “liturgical cycle”, a feature also shared by all of the participating churches, rather than celebrating Eucharist. Reading between the lines it seems that, given the shortage of pastors in all churches, not just the Catholic, they saw as their most likely future that there would be a majority of lay led non-Eucharistic worship services.

Enrolment
The CEC document (1997) defined a preferred enrolment policy for an ecumenical school with Catholic participation as accepting children who were:

1. Members or participating churches
2. Members of another Christian church committed to the vision and mission of an ecumenical school.
3. Have some understanding of the particular Christian tradition to which they belonged.

In addition to these three conditions there were two further essential conditions that they defined:

4. Open to journeying in faith with members of various Christian traditions towards the unity that Jesus desired
   And
5. Supported by parents who have an appreciation of and commitment to their own particular tradition and also a commitment to the vision and mission of an ecumenical school. (P. 10)

All of the ecumenical school developments adopted the CEC (1997) enrolment policy, which is far more stringent in many ways than some enrolment policies in Catholic schools.

At Jubilee the founding vision was also that the Christian communities themselves, not just the pastor, would have ongoing pastoral involvement in the life of the school. Laity, not only the pastors, would be available for involvement with the school and parents would understand on enrolment that the faith community with which they identified would at least make contact to invite them to their church.

Emmaus and Unity both had a stronger Catholic influence in their formative years. This may explain why they were somewhat less evangelistic in their vision. Emmaus simply wanted to explain their “vision of increasing understanding between other faiths” to parents when they enrolled their children. Unity was more in the Catholic parish tradition. They expected that “the college community will contain an appropriate involvement in the life of the Catholic parish and the Uniting Church”, the two co-operating churches in this instance.

These policies could be thought of as a spectrum running from clear outreach to people from the churches at one end to a requirement that the school and its population be involved in the
churches at the other. Each approach reflects the agreed vision of the local churches as they worked together in education.

**Legal, Financial, Governance**

The CEC (1997) vision was clearly that an incorporated body must take both legal and financial responsibility for the school. Brisbane Catholic Education did this as an arm of the Catholic Archdiocese, the incorporated body in this instance. In the places so far where these schools have been founded the co-operating churches have been satisfied with this arrangement since it exposes them to neither legal nor financial risk.

This model does, however, raise some philosophical questions for the Catholic sponsors. Hypothetically, could another school with the blessing of perhaps the Anglican or another mainstream Christian church be founded along similar lines? That is could a non-Catholic church be prepared to take responsibility in the same way for development of an ecumenical school while inviting pastoral co-operation from others including the local Catholic parish? Would the Catholic church support this? From the point of view of consistency it might be difficult for BCE not to support such an initiative, even if it meant they would not then provide a separate Catholic school in a particular growth area.

Governance of all new schools founded in the BCE community is by way of a pastoral school board model as endorsed by the Bishops of Queensland. Members are appointed by the Archbishop through the Executive Director of Catholic Education. The board is advisory to the principal and does not take management decisions nor management responsibility. The school is managed through the central office with the principal, the Area Supervisor, the various Directors and the Executive Director taking management decisions and responsibility as appropriate and as delegated by the Executive Director.

*Ut Unum Sint* (1995) recognised that the differences between the churches are not simply doctrinal. There are other “long-standing misgivings inherited from the past” (2) and that this is the case became obvious at Jubilee in the early stages as governance was considered. Although eventually the churches accepted the concept of management being the ultimate responsibility of a central office, it was treated with some suspicion. The openness professed by BCE had first to be tested and trusted before these fears were allayed. One of the early challenges to be overcome was the appointment of the principal and administration team.

**Leadership and Staffing**

The CEC (1997) did not write in any detailed way about the staff but insisted that the principal should be “a Christian leader with an ecumenical vision”. (P. 7)

To accommodate this vision BCE had to make significant changes to policy on selection and appointment of principal and administrative positions. They needed to allow for non-Catholics to be appointed to leadership in these schools. In doing so they chose not to step back from core requirements re qualifications (in the case of a principal usually a second degree), religious education (8 semester units including scripture, theology and Christian leadership) and a minimum of 5 years successful teaching of religious education. They did, however, relax the requirement to be Catholic, knowing that it would still be very difficult for someone from another denomination, given the way church schools are operated in the Anglican, Uniting and other traditions, to meet the full academic criteria.

Fortunately, their credibility was proven at an early stage at Jubilee, the first ecumenical school. Although the principal appointee was Catholic, the Assistant Principal – Religious Education, was an Anglican with all of the required qualifications and background. All of the other appointees to administrative positions in the other ecumenical schools have indeed been Catholic. However, openness to other appointments was proven in those early years at Jubilee, the first school founded in this new ecumenical mould.

In all communities the selection of staff was seen to be crucial. They were to be people who could “demonstrate a commitment to their faith and to ecumenism”. (Emmanuel Education Brief, 2000, p.10) Confirmed atheists need not apply but those who profess a Christian faith and were committed to both their faith and to dialogue with other Christians were welcome.

*“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me”* (Jn. 7:38)

Are these new formed communities exclusively for the participating churches or can others join with them? Their origins were all different, yet each has left the door open for a wider ecumenical future.
At Jubilee the founding local communities were comprised of the Catholic, Uniting, Anglican and Apostolic churches. Emmaus was a local partnership of Catholic, Uniting, Lutheran and Anglican while at Unity College only the Uniting church joined with the local Catholic parish.

The reasons for involvement or otherwise of various churches were usually driven by local circumstances. The need to look after a nearby Anglican school, for instance, stopped Anglican involvement at Unity College, although this was no impediment to the Anglican pastor at Jubilee who remained a member of his local Anglican school board. All of the founding groups left the door open to other Christian churches who might later wish to join them.

The Jubilee community in their education brief (1999), for instance, saw that the participation of other churches would be subject to “ongoing negotiations”. The Emmaus community (2000) were more specific seeing that those who joined later would need to “have a theology which is consistent with the mainstream theology of the original churches”. They saw that an indicator of this would be mutual recognition of Baptism and a sharing of the affirmation of the Nicene and Apostles Creeds by any churches wishing to participate.

The future could well see some very different partnerships formed at local level given these founding visions.

Some Challenges for Catholic schools
The model of ecumenical school in the Brisbane Archdiocese is still relatively young. Hence any statements about the impact of these schools on their local communities and in particular in their local church communities must be made cautiously. In the longer term it would provide fruitful research to compare and contrast the outcomes for students, parents and staff of being involved in these schools, compared to mainstream Catholic schools. The type of leadership required in these schools could also be a feature of such research.

Ideally this research would first identify whether the school had remained true to its vision as given in the education brief. Some years on, has the vision of being very intentional with enrolment, employment and approaches to religious education and worship been faithfully followed? If so, are there identifiable differences between the young people graduating from these schools and those from other schools administered by the Catholic church?

So far the signs are positive that the openness in presentation of the Christian message and the intentional effort to provide for the spiritual and pastoral needs of those from differing faith backgrounds is bearing fruit. Although only signs, they may pose questions even now for mainstream Catholic schools nationally.

Multi Religious Catholic Schools
Statistics on Catholic enrolment (NCEC, 2007) show that the numbers of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools is now an average of 23% nationally. There are no national statistics on what groups make up this 23%. However, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority regard themselves as “Christian” at least for the purpose of census and enrolment. It is also reasonable to assume that it includes at least some significant numbers of children from families who have a strong religious affiliation with a non-Catholic church.

How should the Catholic school of the future approach the religious and pastoral needs of this growing number of non-Catholic enrolments? As an ex-principal, my own approach, and I’m sure this is probably true of many of my colleagues, was to integrate the non-Catholic students into the religious life of my school. That is, to treat them as “little Catholics”. I’m no longer sure that this is the best way. It appears to be the approach recommended by Cardinal Pell (2006) when he asks “what strategies might be adopted to strengthen the Christian faith and perhaps make converts among the 23% of non-Catholic students in our schools?” (italics mine)

This is a call echoed by Fisher (2006) who, in recognising the increasing non-Catholic enrolment and a pervasive cultural opposition to religion in the wider community advocates that Catholic schools continue to make what he terms a “Catholic” contribution to education. He sees that this contribution should include the education of a sizeable proportion of children from other faith groups but that the Catholic school should be re- visioned as “a principle organ for evangelisation”.

Calls for conversion and evangelisation in our Catholic schools might be contrasted with what some writers see as a post-Vatican II theology of mission. Quillinan (2007) argues that this theology
has changed. In pre-Vatican II theology it was centred firstly on church membership and proclamation of church teachings followed by a commitment to mission and the reign of God, expressed as Christian community. He believes a post-Vatican II theology now places the reign of God at the forefront. Only later are mission, proclamation and lastly, church membership, to be considered priorities. In other words the role of Christians is firstly to live out the reign of God in the world and proclaim the good news by example.

For Quillinan “Catholic schools are called to proclaim the good news by creating a community experience, an experience of the reign of God” (p. 6). He sees it as imperative that “Catholic school communities work to achieve some understanding of the history of each Christian tradition” (p. 7) and this is first of all achieved by dialogue. Phan (2007) quotes the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences as repeatedly suggesting that the only effective way for the church to carry out its mission of evangelisation is dialogue. He sees this dialogue in the Asian context taking place with the poor and marginalised, with those from other religions and with the people themselves, recognising their particular background.

In the context of an Australian church the community background is often not directly focused on church at all. Quillinan (2007) further defines this dialogue as being one which recognises that the Holy Spirit is present in every time and place and secondly that the dialogue is between people who are engaged in a genuine search for truth. In this context, the definition of the Catholic school as being a place of “lively dialogue between young people of different religions and social backgrounds” (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1997/2004) seems to imply that the Catholic school is a place for all who are open to dialogue and search for truth. It is certainly not, as the Declaration on Religious Liberty (1965/1992) points out, in any way a place for coercion.

One of Fisher’s (2006) other proposed options for future Catholic schools, one which he subsequently rejects, is to downsize the system of Catholic schools and provide fewer but religiously “better” schools. Yet in some ways this strengthened religious focus has arguably been adopted by the Brisbane Archdiocese in a different way by providing focused ecumenical schools. These schools, founded at the request of their communities, intend to seriously address the differing religious needs of their clientele. However, whether this has been successful is, as stated above, an interesting question for further research.

Francis (1984) provides a note of caution to the Pell (2006) and Fisher (2006) approaches. His research among British Catholic schools found that the enrolment of a large number of non-Catholic students appeared to have a detrimental effect on the Catholic majority. He recommends that if the Catholic sector is to maintain its ethos it needs to re-assess this policy on enrolment. On the other hand, research from over 20 years ago and in another cultural context must also be treated cautiously. The world of Catholic schools in the Australian context has changed dramatically since the 80’s as the significant longitudinal studies of Flynn (1975, 1985, 1993) have shown.

Cahill (2006) takes a different approach. He recognises the “religiously competitive” nature of modern Australian Catholic schools but asks how Jesus might be presented “in a classroom where several faiths are represented”. In his opinion Catholic schools should “take as many students from faith traditions other than Christian as we can without damaging cohesion or Catholic character”. It is notable that Cahill’s recommendation goes well beyond being ecumenical to the stage of being multi faith. However, as pointed out above, it is highly likely that the larger percentage of non-Catholic students in our schools still have some type of “Christian” background and it is to this group that I will address future remarks and suggestions.

These approaches raise numerous questions. Are Catholic schools to emphasise only the presentation of a ‘Catholic’ view of religion, with a view to evangelisation and perhaps conversion, at least for some? Are they about helping those of other faiths to understand the Catholic culture and point of view? Or, perhaps, should they develop their capacity to allow students to grow as Christians true to their own tradition?

Francis (1984) points out the danger of diluting the Catholic ethos if we do not intentionally address the issue of who is in our schools. Arguably, the ecumenical schools do this by inclusion and acceptance. Could Catholic schools do the same? However, what would a Catholic school look like if it seriously addressed Cahill’s (2006) recommendations, at least in the realm of an ecumenical rather than multi-faith education?
The Catholic Perspective on Non Catholic Enrolments
The Catholic Education Council and Commission for Ecumenism were intending to write a parallel document to their original paper on ecumenical schools that would have addressed this issue. What might it have said?

Would the ethos of the school have recognised the “special contribution” from traditions of those from other Christian faiths enrolled in the school? How would it have done this? By worship together? By inviting participation at times from the members of the other Christian churches in surrounding communities?

A Catholic school that intentionally addressed the faith background of its students might adapt its religious education program to suit the needs of its constituents. Would such a school provide for the teaching, where appropriate, of the differences in Protestant and Catholic traditions? Would it celebrate and accept the gifts that those from the Protestant tradition bring to this dialogue?

As an arm of church, is the Catholic school of the future able to provide a hub for outreach? The Jubilee model, where the intention was to contact and invite parents to visit their identified faith community could perhaps be used by a Catholic school with significant non-Catholic enrolments. In an era where probably no more than 15% of the 77% nominally Catholic students are actually church attending, such contact and invitation from local Catholic parishes could be a positive initiative. But, would we be prepared for the Anglicans and for the Lutherans to contact their own families through Catholic schools?

These are all questions that need to be pondered in the context of leadership for the Catholic school of the future. It will be a very different world and my own hope is that there are some visionary and brave leaders able to take forward the reality of our current student and parent communities in a very different way.

Leading the Catholic school of the future
Quillinan (2007) translates the change to the missionary focus of the church since Vatican II into a call for Catholic schools to first and foremost form community. Within that community it is possible to take up the Phan (2007) challenge to also create dialogue among staff, parents and students so far as this dialogue is age appropriate.

If the first task of the Catholic school is to create an authentic Christian community and, in line with Vatican II, actual allegiance to or conversion to church membership is not the first but in fact the final task of mission, this has implications for schools and hence for school leadership.

Quillinan (2007) seems to imply that the increasing numbers of non-Catholics that are in Catholic schools can be catered for authentically in a school that forms a real Christian community. Certainly, it would be inauthentic to organise this community with an underlying assumption that all of its members are Catholics or even believers. This is not in the tradition of dialogue. Ideally such a community would recognise and celebrate the backgrounds of all who form part of it.

Archbishop Phillip Wilson (2007) in his recent address to the Catholic Administrators’ Conference based his comments on the work of Charles Taylor. He recognised that the conversion of large groups of people, in terms of a movement to formal church allegiance is no longer possible or even desirable. He believes that each individual will make their own choice with regards to formal allegiance to church. Taylor (see Kavanagh, 2007) on whom Wilson based his remarks, believes that with regard to questions such as the meaning of life, the source of goodness and human values, “nobody has the standard answer that can convince everybody else and everybody is asking these questions”. Thus, Wilson suggests that we are in a multi-faith society with multiple answers. He believes this individual search is in fact in line with Augustine’s theological tradition. For Wilson “leading people to faith can only take place with conversion of individual hearts and minds”.

Taylor (see Kavanagh, 2007) goes further in suggesting that people such as the Dali Lama provide a good example of extraordinary figures that can bring people to faith. For him they provide “a certain direction in a search that they can trust, partly because they were impressed by the way it was expressed, partly because the person impressed them”. This provides the ultimate challenge for leadership in Catholic schools of the future. Those who lead them are challenged to be extraordinary people of holiness able to share their journey and their search. They will share it with their staff, also challenged in their own faith. As Wilson (2007) states “for believers, the challenge is to proclaim the gospel so that those whom we encounter may appropriate it as the deepest truth of their own spiritual journey”. However, there is
more to it than this. It is not simply proclaiming the gospel, as has been pointed out above, the first task is to form a genuine Christian community and the second is to dialogue. This dialogue will first be facilitated by people of faith leading the community but, just as importantly by people who are also aware of their own search and prepared to share both their certainties and their uncertainties.

Could this journey be undertaken by teachers and leaders who come from multiple Christian faith backgrounds? It is certainly a challenge for Catholic schools to think that leadership and staff could mirror the make-up of enrolments in the school. That is, a 30% Anglican enrolment is mirrored by 30% of staff being faith-filled Anglicans. However, if the prime task is to form a Christian community, then this may be where at least some Catholic schools are called today.

Summary
This paper has outlined the history and background of the founding of three ecumenical schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane under the administration of Catholic Education. It contends that the signs so far are positive for both the ecumenical dialogue and church ministry among the school communities. This has resulted from the close involvement of local faith communities in the schools from the beginning.

The paper poses a challenge for the majority of Catholic schools with increasing numbers of Catholic enrolments. It proposes the next step we might consider is to begin, at least in some schools, taking the challenge seriously of having a significant number of non-Catholic enrolments. This would be done by first recognising the differing faith backgrounds of the students and then forging links, where they might exist, with their own church communities in the spirit of ecumenical interaction. The leadership of a Catholic school that rises to this challenge will look very different in the future.

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*Dr Paul McQuillan is Director of Administrative Services for Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education and an honorary research fellow with Australian Catholic University. He has been a high school teacher, Principal and system administrator in four states and territories and more than thirty years service to catholic education.
Email: pmcquillan@bne.catholic.edu.au
Maurice Ryan*

Future Catholic Schools: Exclusive, Inclusive and Plural Options

Introduction
Among the outcomes of the events of September 11 has been a flurry of new laws to identify suspect individuals, as well as the creation of policies to promote cultural integration. Communities are involved in a determined struggle to shore up their defence capabilities while simultaneously looking for new ways to communicate with each across cultural divides (Fullilove, 2008). This hydra-headed concern for security and for cross-cultural engagement is a characteristic of the contemporary world. Australian Catholic schools inhabit this cultural terrain. It is causing new questions to be asked about the nature and purpose of the schools and to re-assess the imagery that has sustained the schools in this country for almost two centuries.

The ambivalence in the broader community is mirrored among people concerned for the present and future of Australian Catholic schools: some seek to exclude those who are not “us”; others argue enthusiastically for their integration into the life of the Catholic school. Gabriel Moran has said that there is good news and bad news in all this: the good news is that no one knows more than me about how to proceed; the bad news is that no one knows more than me about how to proceed (Moran, 2007). If there is validity in this dictum, prospects for Australian Catholic schools involve greater complexity, more robust debate about future steps and an era of change for all. Some refinement in the guiding assumptions, policies and practices of education in Australian Catholic schools is a near certainty.

The following discussion will focus on the enrolment in Catholic schools of students who are not Catholics. The question of inclusion of staff and others who are not Catholics in Catholic schools has its own complexities but those will not be considered directly here.

Official Catholic Policies on Inclusion: A Documentary Survey
Discussion about the inclusion of students who are not Catholics in Catholic schools was propelled by the Second Vatican Council (1962-5). A general spirit of openness and inclusion was evident at that Council and this spilled over into thinking about all Church agencies. Vatican II opened up consideration of the missionary and pastoral consequences of dialogue with other religions in ways not previously contemplated in official Catholic documents. The Council document on missionary activity, Ad Gentes, was among the first to identify the role of Catholic schools in the promotion of the public good in developing countries. This document advised that: “With special care, let them devote themselves to the education of children and young people by means of different kinds of schools, which should be considered not only as the most excellent means of forming and developing Christian youth, but also as a valuable public service, especially in the developing nations, working toward the uplifting of human dignity, and toward better living conditions” (Ad gentes, para. 12). This sentiment was echoed in the Council’s Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis) which argued that Catholic schools should take on different forms in keeping with local circumstances. In this context, the authors reported that, “the Church considers very dear to her heart those Catholic schools, found especially in the areas of the new churches, which are attended also by students who are not Catholic” (Gravissimum educationis, para. 9).

Vatican II’s openness to students from other religious traditions informed post-conciliar documents on religious education and catechesis. The 1982 document from the Congregation for Catholic Education, Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith recognised the existence of students in Catholic schools “who do not profess the Catholic faith, or perhaps are without any religious faith at all”. The authors characterised faith as a free response of the human person to God: “Therefore, while Catholic educators will teach doctrine in conformity with their own religious convictions and in accord with the
identity of the school, they must at the same time have the greatest respect for those students who are not Catholics. They should be open at all times to authentic dialogue, convinced that in these circumstances the best testimony that they can give of their own faith is a warm and sincere appreciation for anyone who is honestly seeking God according to his or her own conscience” (SCCE, 1982, para. 42). This document marks a move to wrestle with the practical implications of inclusion. The 1980s saw a number of such principles of inclusion established by Church officials. The openness established at Vatican II was accepted with the addition of certain caveats.

One of those caveats was affirmation of the maintenance of a Catholic identity in the Catholic school. A principle was outlined that sought to balance acceptance of others with the right to proclaim Catholic beliefs and values. The same Congregation for Catholic Education in 1988 published an expanded reflection on the theme of inclusion. They acknowledged that not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic Church, and that in some places a majority of students is not Catholic. The authors directed that:

The religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, and this freedom is explicitly recognised by the Church. On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law (CCE, 1988, para. 6).

The authors thought that “evangelisation is not easy - it may not even be possible. We should look to pre-evangelisation: to the development of a religious sense of life” (CCE, 1988, para. 108).

Another Vatican department with a close interest in the conduct of Catholic schools is the Congregation for the Clergy, the department with primary responsibility for catechesis. This Congregation shares the concerns about the implications of diversity:

When students and their families become associated with Catholic schools because of the quality of education offered in the school, or for other possible reasons, catechetical activity is necessarily limited and even religious education - when possible - accentuates its cultural character. The contribution of such schools is always “a service of great value to men”, as well as an internal element of evangelisation of the Church (CC, 1997, 260).

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997, para. 75) suggested that it is possible to divide students in Catholic schools into three categories according to their religious beliefs: believers, searchers and non-believers. This tripartite division provides a frame for considering the variety of religious needs and interests of students in Catholic schools – whether Catholic or not. This description of the student body in a Catholic school allows a more nuanced interpretation of students’ religious background. It implies a reality that many report informally: the “believing” students in many Catholic schools belong to religious communities other than Catholic; many Catholic students belong to the searching and non-believing cohorts, as defined by the Congregation for the Clergy.

In 1997, the Congregation for Catholic Education amplified its conviction that Catholic schools were public - not private - institutions and not reserved only for Catholics. They argued that the Catholic school has come into being not as a private initiative, “but as an expression of the reality of the Church, having by its very nature a public character. It fulfils a service of public usefulness and, although clearly and decidedly configured in the perspective of the Catholic faith, is not reserved to Catholics only, but is open to all those who appreciate and share its qualified educational project” (CCE, 1997, para. 16). The precise nature of this “qualified educational project” was not defined and is certainly open to inference and contested claims. Nevertheless, the introduction of this concept into official documents shows an interest in providing delimitations to the policy of undifferentiated, open access and inclusion. A range of potential dilemmas can be discovered in this approach: for example, in a context of competition for enrolment places, what would happen if a student who was not a Catholic was able to demonstrate a greater appreciation and sharing in the school’s “qualified educational project” than a Catholic student?

Official Catholic Church statements over the past generation are clear and consistent about the presence of students who are not Catholics in Catholic schools: these students are welcome.
While this welcome is not without conditions— they must share the Catholic school’s “qualified educational project”—there is a consistently expressed guidance to Catholic schools to include students who are not Catholics. But, ambivalence exists among Church officials as to what their presence means for Catholic schools. Inferences can be drawn from official documents that Catholic schools ought to provide opportunities for evangelisation of students who are not Catholic. Less developed in the documentary discussions is any consideration of the support Catholic schools might offer these students in developing their religious faith within their own religious tradition (Chambers, Grajczonek & Ryan, 2006).

Three Possible Directions for Inclusion
Official Church documents direct Catholic schools to include students who are not Catholics, but offer scarce practical advice about how to resolve the daily challenges involved in implementing this policy. The following discussion will describe and evaluate three possible pathways for responding to this situation. The three possibilities are based on those first described by Alan Race (1983) and commonly adopted by a number of analysts since: exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist. Each will provide a form for understanding and evaluating the practical steps necessary for including students who are not Catholics.

Exclusive Catholic Schools
An exclusive approach to enrolment in a Catholic school focuses attention on students who are Catholic or who may become Catholic. The primary aim of an exclusivist approach is Church maintenance: the school is conceptualised as a place for teaching the Catholic tradition and for preserving and conserving Catholic culture. The future Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, as head of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith gave expression to an exclusivist approach in an interview in 1997 when he argued that Catholic schools should focus directly on their role of ecclesial enculturation:

What is our school system doing at a time when religious instruction is widespread? I think that it was an error not to pass on more content…Here, I think, we ought to be ready for a change, to say that if in this secular world we have religious instruction at all in the schools, we have to assume that we will not be able to convert many in schools to the faith. But the students should find out what Christianity is; they should receive good information in a sympathetic way so that they are stimulated to ask: Is this perhaps for me? (Ratzinger, 1997, pp. 125-6).

This approach stresses the classroom religion program’s role in evangelisation, as a site of conversion to Catholicism, albeit one with an admittedly low success rate. This observation is echoed in the General Directory for Catechesis (CC, 1997, p. 75) which stated that “students have the right to learn with truth the religion to which they belong. This right to know Christ, and the salvific message proclaimed by Him cannot be neglected”. Both statements strongly infer that enrolment in Catholic schools is for Catholics, or at least Christians, who may need to be strengthened in their Catholic (Christian?) faith by the classroom program.

Exclusivists argue that in order for this ecclesial conservation to be effective, those who are not already involved in, or are not seeking, a Catholic religious formation ought to be excluded from the Catholic school. A common tool for enforcing this exclusion is the imposition of enrolment caps on students who are not Catholics. If they are included, the presence of students who are not Catholics is either acknowledged weakly, without regard for their particular religious needs and interests, or they are seen as potential converts to Catholicism. For example, George Pell, Cardinal archbishop of Sydney, embodies this exclusivist aim in his question to a conference of Catholic educators: “What strategies might be adopted to strengthen the Christian faith and perhaps make converts among the 23% of non-Catholic students in our schools?” (Pell, 2006, p. 8).

The main contribution of an exclusivist approach to the practice of Catholic schools is Church enculturation. The Catholic school is one of the major ways Catholic communities have employed to ensure the continuation of their Catholic identity. For the exclusivists, the focus of the classroom religion program is an exposition of Catholic teachings designed to stimulate Catholic faith or further inquiry. The religious dimension of the whole school is weighted towards Catholic symbols, rituals, beliefs and practices. Little or no attention is given to members of other religious communities present in the school. Compulsory attendance is required of all students “in activities and ceremonies which suppose a shared faith in the participants” (Rummery, 2001, p. 2). An exclusivist approach obliges school leaders to turn a blind eye to the growing religious diversity.
among students, or effectively to ignore it by the use of slogans, such as: “They knew what they were in for when they enrolled in the school”.

A strictly exclusivist approach to schooling risks increasing some undesirable, unintended consequences in the schooling of Catholic students, namely: *triumphalism* (“we are better than you”); *parochialism* (“we only associate with our own people”) or *sectarianism* (“our way is the right way”). The exclusivist maintains a focus on the intramural language and concerns of the group despite the evidence that these concerns are daily decreasing in the face of the complex and diverse communities in which Catholic schools are located. Students and others can judge these ideological shortcomings as irrelevant, even harmful, for the ways they desire to live in the world. Thomas Groome (1998) has pointed to the fine line religious people must walk when honouring the particularity of *sectarian expression* while avoiding the intolerance of *sectarianism*. Groome (1998, p. 42) claims that “every religious community and tradition needs to claim its identity but is surely bound - in heaven’s name - not to encourage sectarianism. This is an imperative for Christians if they are to honor their doctrine of universality of God’s love”.

This invisibility or denial of religious diversity is a stumbling block to implementing an exclusivist approach in a contemporary Catholic school. For most contemporary Catholic school classrooms, such simple choices no longer present themselves. An exclusive interest in enrolling Catholics risks engagement with a constantly declining public. Nevertheless, the exclusivist concern for tradition needs to be heeded for its concern for cultural particularity and continuity.

**Inclusive Catholic Schools**

Those who pursue inclusivist policies and approaches in Catholic schools realise that the world has changed and something needs to be done to respond to the fracturing of the religious landscape. An inclusivist approach accepts the existence of religious diversity in the global and local community and seeks actively to include this diversity within the context of the school. Those who embrace inclusivity in school enrolments point to the realignment of religious and educational interests among increasing numbers of Catholics. For example, Kieran and Hession (2005) report the rapid growth in Ireland of the *Educate Together* movement. This development suggests “parents and teachers are looking for what they perceive to be a more democratic, multidimensional, transparent and inclusive school system” (Kieran & Hession, 2005, p. 287). Kieran and Hession contend that this trend is a direct challenge to the exclusivist interests of Irish Catholic school authorities.

Efforts at inclusion can take many forms within contemporary Catholic education. One example of the impact of an inclusivist approach in Catholic schools is the focus of the classroom religion program on “world religions” or a descriptive-comparative approach to presenting the world’s religions in a dispassionate and tolerant manner. Attempts to teach the world’s religions in an “objective” manner are admirable in their intention, but can flounder under the weight of the teacher’s inability to master and teach the vast range of material required - and students’ incapacity to comprehend it even at a surface level.

Examples of inclusion also exist in school organisation. Some Catholic authorities have opted to combine their resources with other Christian communities to create “ecumenical” schools which share governance structures, financing, curriculum development and all other aspects of the school’s life with representatives from a range of Christian communities (McQuillan & Hutton, 2007). Ecumenical schools usually come into being as a result of local community initiative fostered in an atmosphere of mutual respect and financial constraint. These kinds of initiatives draw criticism from those who claim that Catholic identity is dissolved in the midst of a generalised Christian environment. The charge is made that attempts to be all-inclusive inevitability result in a loss of a particular, communal character. Harsher critics point to the relativism that could be fostered when everything seems to be accorded equal time and status. Relativism is the belief that judgments of value vary according to the circumstances of time and place. The fear of critics of inclusive enrolment policies is that students learn of Catholicism as merely one option among a range of equally viable truth claims.

Researchers have paid attention to the impact of inclusive enrolment policies on the Catholic identity of Catholic students. The guiding normative assumption is that Catholic identity in a Catholic school is dependent upon the strong Catholicity of the student population: an increase in the percentage of students who are not Catholics is perceived to be a direct threat to the Catholic identity of the school and an impediment to
strengthening the Catholic commitment of Catholic students. Francis and Gibson (2001) from their examination of Scottish Catholic schools questioned whether “the presence of non-Catholic pupils may have a deleterious impact on the overall school ethos as reflected in the attitude towards Christianity of the student body as a whole” (2001, p. 49). This perspective has been challenged by researchers who point to the concept of Catholic identity as complex, multilayered and multifaceted. The student body includes a spectrum of so-called “churched” and “unchurched” young people in addition to a spectrum of young people with varying commitments to a range of other religious communities (Cummings, 1996; Clark, 2005; Donlevy, 2006; McCarthy, 2007). Donlevy (2006) argued that “inclusion heightens and intensifies the reflectivity of Catholic students vis-a-vis both the commonality amongst the many Christian and non-Christian faiths in the experiential affective realm and the acceptance of fundamental humanistic values” (2006, p. 13). Discussion of inclusion and Catholic identity requires a more nuanced treatment than mere reliance on largely untested assumptions that Catholic identity is challenged at nominal percentage levels of student enrolments (Non-Catholic cap, 2005).

**Plurality in Catholic Schools**

The third possible response to the inclusion in Catholic schools of students who are not Catholics is to adopt a pluralist approach. A pluralist approach attempts to find the appropriate balance between exclusivist and inclusivist aims. Plurality recognises and celebrates the existence of a variety of religious claims, but does not seek a grounded relation between a familiar tradition and other traditions. It observes the growing plurality within particular religious groups where members “hold very different views and follow different preferences in life, even in relation to religion” (Schweitzer, 2007, p. 3). Pluralists seek to find the correct balance - in any and every situation - between exclusivist demands for particularity, concreteness and cultural continuity, and inclusivist claims for openness, commonality and diversity. Plurality requires a “grounding in the particular that opens to the universal” (Groome, 1998, p. 396). Plurality requires a disciplined commitment to tolerant understanding of the other. This kind of tolerance is not a matter of merely being nice to each other. It respects differences of beliefs and requires of each person that a “very difficult and I suspect painful turn in thinking has to be achieved” (Crotty, 2006, p. 69). Gabriel Moran has described how an expanded meaning of tolerance:

accepts the fact that religious beliefs exist and are important to people. The task of education is to try to understand what these beliefs mean rather than to bypass them or eliminate them. A strong religious belief is not an obstacle to being tolerant; on the contrary, it can be the precondition of a tolerance that respects the other person, including what the other person believes. In this case, conflicts do not go away; they are openly acknowledged, and the task is to find acceptable compromises so that all parties can co-exist (Moran, 2006, p. 25).

One way to illustrate this form of respect for difference in a Catholic school context can be seen in the experience of Gerard Rummery, an Australian de la Salle brother, who recalls how he and a colleague encountered an airline pilot in Cairo airport in 1989. In the course of the conversation, the pilot revealed that he had been a student of the de la Salle brothers at St. Mark’s school in Alexandria, Egypt. The pilot spoke with great affection for the brothers and their work. Before leaving, he said to them:

Brothers, before you go, I wish to say something to you. Today I am flying a Jumbo jet and when I am at the end of the runway waiting to fly, the last thing I always say to myself is “Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of Allah” - and that is something that you taught me (Rummery, 2002, p. 66).

A pluralist approach requires refinement in the ways in which religion and education are spoken about in the Catholic school. This refined language is dependent upon a number of distinctions in discussions about the religious and educational goals of the school. The requirement is to distinguish the particular (exclusive) religious goals from the broadly educational (inclusive) ones (Rummery, 2001, p. 13). For example, all students can study a classroom curriculum that focuses on Catholic tradition but remains open to a consideration of the relations between Catholicism and other religious groups, especially as these have arisen within the local region as well as beyond it. In this way, the existence of students in the classroom who are not Catholics is an educational resource. All students can learn the skills of engagement in inter-religious dialogue, and practise these skills in their classrooms. Classroom teaching and learning activities can be selected and
implemented that promote this open dialogue. The students can appreciate and practise a disciplined language that causes no offence to others.

Another necessary distinction exists between the classroom and the religious dimension of the school as a whole. The classroom religion program can propose a Catholic program of studies, albeit one open to the religious ways of others. The classroom religion program does not seek to impose a Catholic (or any other religious way) on students. At times, this distinction can mean that the classroom religion program stands in tension with the Catholic school in which it is located. The religious dimension of the school as a whole offers numerous opportunities (artistic, service, liturgical, dramatic, architectural…) for students to engage with the Catholic tradition. Sometimes these opportunities will provide a direct invitation for a direct response in faith; other experiences will involve an indirect, even subconscious, engagement with the life of faith.

In a pluralist Catholic school, opportunities are provided for students who are not Catholics to practise and observe their own religious forms. For example, times and places for prayer are established in the school to allow for students to observe their own prayer rituals. Students who are not Catholics are affirmed in their own religious ways. Any attempts to proselytise are explicitly and implicitly ruled out. The school retains its authority to propose a Catholic way of life, but this is not imposed on any students, Catholic or other. The obverse is also true: those students from other religious traditions do not seek to proselytise their fellow students. The classroom religion program is founded on educational principles, not principles derived from Church pastoral ministry. The classroom religion program is weighted towards Christian material, but connections and links to other religious ways are actively pursued. The classroom religion program does not adopt a phenomenological, comparative approach which examines all religions with dispassionate fairness.

A pluralist approach seeks an open, tolerant understanding of the religious ways of others, founded on a thorough consideration of a familiar religious way. As Georgetown University theologian Peter Phan (2007, pp. 20-1) has argued, “for the Catholic Church religious diversity is not a curse but a blessing”. Phan considers that the Church does not regard religious differences as a “clash of civilizations”, nor as a “threat to its identity nor does it limit itself to polite tolerance, which at bottom is disguised intolerance. Rather, the Church views other religious faiths with respect and admiration and enters into dialogue with them in order to be enriched by them”. In this perspective, universal meaning is embodied, not in one religious (Christian) community, but potentially in many. Catholics do not need to fear the presence of the other in their midst. On the contrary, a fuller, more profound self-understanding of Catholicism and Catholic culture requires an informed dialogue and interaction with those who do not share the same religious culture. A Catholic school with a religiously diverse enrolment offers privileged access to this kind of respectful dialogue (Hollenbach, 1996).

Exactly how this respectful dialogue and search for universal meaning might be conducted in Catholic schools must be considered to be a work in progress. Some preliminary steps are available within the Church’s pastoral repertoire. For example, official guidance on ecumenical relations with Christian communities encourages Catholic school authorities to allow “clergy of other Communities” to use Catholic school and parish facilities “including the church or chapel” to provide “spiritual and sacramental ministration of their own faithful” for Christian students in Catholic schools (Pontifical Council, 1993, para. 141). This document, while conscious of the increasing encounters with members of other religions, does not extend the same invitation to those members of other religions enrolled in Catholic schools. Nevertheless, a helpful precedent may have been set that encourages Catholic schools to provide “spiritual ministration” to students from other religions.

**Conclusion**

All Church schools who confront the consequences of religious plurality will grapple with a series of new questions: “Depending on one’s theological perspective, denominationally diverse Catholic schools may present a wonderful opportunity for Christian dialogue or be a serious dilution of religious character” (Greene & O’Keefe, 2001, p. 176). In any case, the issue may be forced upon Australian Catholic schools whether they welcome it or not, especially given the realities of public funding and as a result of their engaged presence in a shifting cultural landscape.

Finding ways for religions and cultures to engage with each other in a mutually supportive manner is the pressing task of the rising generation. It begins with recognition that religious people, in the world
that is emerging, will configure their own religious ways - to some extent - in relation to the religious ways of others. This requires fruitful encounters with “the other” in educationally advantageous contexts constructed for the mutual benefit of all concerned. Catholic schools are privileged places for this pressing educational task to be lived out during the childhood and adolescent years.

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Journal of Religious Education 56(4) 2008 27


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*Dr Maurice Ryan is a Senior Lecturer at School of Religious Education Australian Catholic University McAuley Campus, Virginia, Queensland m.ryan@mcauley.acu.edu.au*
Non-Catholic Students’ Experiences in Catholic High Schools: Findings from Two Qualitative Studies

Abstract
This paper examined the experiences of two groups of non-Catholic students in Catholic high schools in two Western Canadian provinces. The first group was composed of ten non-Catholic graduates of a Catholic high school. The second group was composed of twelve current non-Catholic high school students unequally spread out within five Catholic high schools. The combined emergent themes of these studies produced, among other things, two significant themes: the importance of the religious commitment of the non-Catholic family to the student’s positive or negative religious experience in the school and the non-Catholic students’ understanding of faith and religion resulting from her or his high school experiences in a Catholic high school.

Introduction
There has been a concern expressed by some in Catholic school education in the United Kingdom (Francis & Egan, 1986; Bogle, 2007), the United States of America (National Catholic Educational Association, Colbert, personal communication, August 6, 2001), Australia (Catholic News, 2005; Bishops of New South Wales and the ACT, 2007), and Canada (Mulligan, 1999) regarding the increasing number of non-Catholic students in Catholic high schools: inclusion.

The primary concern seems to be what effect, if any, that increase may have upon the ethos of Catholic Schools. However, little has been written with regard to the effects upon non-Catholic students attending Catholic schools (Selley, 2000; Cummings, 1996).

This paper seeks to augment the academic literature with respect to the effects of inclusion upon non-Catholic students in Catholic high schools. In that regard, this paper offers the findings of two qualitative studies into the inclusion of non-Catholic students in Catholic high schools. At the outset it is necessary to advise the reader of the limitations of this paper. The two research studies which are the basis for this paper employed student participants who were Christian, agnostic, or atheist. Further, the number of participants, non-Catholic students, was very limited due to political and unknown reasons notwithstanding this researcher’s best efforts. Therefore, the studies’ findings do not claim more than to be qualitative hints at issues which appear to be important in the area of the inclusion of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools.

The first study examines the experiences of ten recently graduated non-Catholic students in a Western Canadian Catholic urban high school. The second study involves twelve non-Catholic students currently in Western Canadian urban high schools.

This paper is in four parts. Part I provides a brief review of the official Catholic Church’s position on inclusion, academic research, and other sources of information. Part II briefly provides the contexts of the two studies. Part III states the methodology and methods employed in the studies and speaks of the emergence of themes from the collected data. Part IV offers the emergent theory from the studies with the caveat that such theory suggests possible matters of significance and concern for Catholic high schools but that the theory is not generalizable due to the small number of participants, the particular contextual factors of the studies, and the nature of qualitative studies.

PART I
A Review of the Literature of Inclusion
The literature on the inclusion of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools is not extensive and can be viewed in three areas: the Church, scholarly works, and the reports from the field as noted in the media. It is to those three areas that I now turn.
The Church and Inclusion
The Catholic Church considers “very dear to her heart those Catholic schools . . . which are attended . . . by students who are not Catholics” (Vatican II, 1965a, para. 9), and acknowledges that such students have “the right to religious freedom . . . [and that] no one . . . is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will” (Vatican II, 1965b, paras. 2 & 10). Indeed, “the Catholic school offers itself to all, non-Christians included, with all its distinctive aims and means, acknowledging, preserving and promoting the spiritual and moral qualities, the social and cultural values, which characterize different civilizations” (Congregation, 1977, para. 85). It is hoped that Catholic education may “help non-Catholics to have a better knowledge and appreciation of the Catholic Church and her conviction of being the universal help towards salvation” (John Paul II, 1979, para. 32). In that task, teachers are admonished to,

have the greatest respect for those students who are not Catholics . . . [and teachers] should be open at all times to authentic dialogue, convinced that in these circumstances the best testimony that they can give of their own faith is a warm and sincere appreciation for anyone who is seeking God according to his or her own conscience. (Congregation, 1982, para. 42)

In 1988 the Congregation for Catholic Education stated,

Not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic Church; not all are Christians. There are, in fact, countries in which the vast majority of the students are not Catholics - a reality which the Council called attention to . . . . The religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, and this freedom is explicitly recognized by the Church . . . On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law. (Congregation, 1988, para. 6.)

The Catholic Catechism (Catechism, 1992) reiterates the above saying that everyone has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. It states that “[the individual] . . . must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he [or she] be prevented from acting according to his [or her] conscience, especially in religious matters” (para. 1782). In 1997, the Church re-stated its position that “[Catholic education] is not reserved to Catholics only, but is open to all those who appreciate and share its qualified education project” (Congregation, 1997, para. 16).

In sum, the Catholic Church invites all who sincerely wish to share and participate in the objectives of Catholic education to enter the Catholic school community. The promise is of a Christian based education within a faith community where knowledge of the Catholic faith is taught, lived, and shared with non-Catholics. They are sincerely invited to dialogue with others about their faith and beliefs in an atmosphere of both freedom of conscience and religion.

Scholars and Inclusion
There are only a few scholarly treatments in the United States and Canada dealing either directly or indirectly with the inclusion of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools. However, based upon the available evidence, in general, it is fair to say that non-Catholic parents in the United States “rank academic program, teaching of moral and spiritual values, discipline, religious atmosphere, and safety, in that order, as the primary reasons they send their children to Catholic school [emphasis added] (Hickey, 1983; Penn, 1985). In Canada’s publicly supported Catholic schools, in Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, no financial sacrifice is required from Catholic families for their children’s attendance at Catholic schools. Hence, mere convenience is, in some cases, a significant if not the only factor in sending their children to Catholic schools (McKay, 2002; Jelinski, 1994).

Cummings (1996) attempted to study the impact of non-Catholic students on the perceived Catholic identity of Catholic secondary schools in a part of the United States but was unable to find a “strongly-shared religious foundation” in any of the twelve schools in order to respond to his research questions (p. 133). The idea of the existence of a faith community into which non-Catholic students enter when they attend a Catholic high school is, as evidenced by Cumming’s study, not always a certainty.

Seeley (2002) examined, amongst other things,
“the influences that non-Catholic secondary students perceive that the Catholic secondary high school has had on their faith formation” (p. 4). Her study involved six non-Catholic students in their graduation year. She concluded that being non-Catholic “did not play a significant role in their feelings that they were part of the school community” (p. 84), “friends were the essential core of the school community for the participants” (p. 82), “most favourable perceptions of the school came during the discussion of their friendliness of other students and the teachers” (p. 84), “most of the participants’ responses to questions about Catholicism as a formal religion were either negative or neutral” (p. 85).

Burwell’s (2005) thesis “Dialogue about religion and God in Catholic schools with multi-faith populations” used one school in Canada, one in the United States, and two in India for his research and he concluded that the issue of inclusion seems to be how religious-education programs and faith formation in Catholic schools can be modified so that students are able to obtain an experience of God, opportunities to dialogue with others, and an ability to grow as religious persons regardless of whether they are Catholic or not. (pp. 28-29)

**The Field and Inclusion**

The significance of inclusion is clear. The Canadian Catholic Schools Trustees’ Association (2005) noted that inclusion has become a major issue in the province of Saskatchewan as public school districts seek financial compensation for non-Catholic students attending Catholic schools. In the Province of Alberta, litigation has commenced involving the financial loss to the Public school district due to non-Catholic students attending an expanded Catholic school district *(Board of Trustees of Aspen View Regional Division No. 19)*. In the Province of Ontario, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association (Ontario, 2000) identified what they believed to be one of the “Major Issues Facing Catholic Education . . . the increasing number of non-Catholic students who are present in the secondary schools . . .” (p. 17). In the United States the average number of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools is approximately 13.5 percent. I presented a paper on the topic of inclusion at the 2003 National Catholic Educational Association’s Convention in St. Louis and was advised that the topic is of increasing concern to Catholic schools in America (Donlevy, 2003a).

In Australia the issue of inclusion remains a current issue in Catholic schools (Catholic News, April 8, 2005).

In sum, the inclusion of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools is a topic whose time has come in Canada, the United States, Australia, and as Francis (1986) suggested in the United Kingdom, “the place of non-Catholic pupils in Catholic secondary schools is a proper subject for educational research” (p. 1).

**PART II**

**Context**

Ten recent graduates of a Catholic high school were the participants for Study # 1. They were selected using the snowball method by tapping into the assistance of one of the graduates who was a son of a friend of the researcher. The high school attended was urban, upper middle class, almost entirely Caucasian, in the Western Canadian Province of Saskatchewan. The student population was approximately 1000. The percentage of non-Catholic students in the school is estimated at 35-50 percent.

All participants in Study # 1 were Caucasian, eight males and two females. None were married although two were engaged. All had attended the school, and Christian Ethics classes, grades nine to twelve inclusive, graduating from 2004 through 2006.

The relevant research questions for this study were:

1. Is the religion or faith of the non-Catholic student affected by attending a Catholic high school?

2. Does the non-Catholic student experience a sense of being the Other within the Catholic high school community?

3. Does the non-Catholic student experience the school community as a faith community?

4. How do the actions of the Catholic high school teacher affect the perception of the non-Catholic student to the Catholic faith?

5. What is of the greatest significance to non-Catholic students in the Catholic high school?

In Study # 2, it was planned that non-Catholic students from grades 10, 11, and 12 within six Catholic schools in Alberta would be interviewed.
in focus groups as was the case with my earlier work in Saskatchewan with ninety-eight Catholic students (Donlevy, 2003b).

The relevant research questions for this study were:

1. Is the religion or faith of the non-Catholic student affected by attending a Catholic high school?
2. Does the non-Catholic student experience a sense of being the Other within the Catholic high school community?
3. Does the non-Catholic student experience the school community as a faith community?
4. How do the actions of the Catholic high school teacher affect the perception of the non-Catholic student to the Catholic faith?

Notably, the fifth question from the first study was not asked of the participants in the second study. Why was that so? I determined that as Study # 2 dealt with students currently in Catholic high schools the participants would not have the emotional and mature distance in time from their school experiences in order to have significant responses as did the students in Study # 1 because the latter students had graduated a few years before being part of that study. In hindsight, I would have asked Question # 5 of the participants in Study # 2 as the responses may have had some unknown significance.

In Study # 2, notices, invitations, and consent forms were sent to all 233 non-Catholic high school students and their families through the main office of each of the schools. Only thirteen students, four males and nine females, chose to participate in the study. All participants were Caucasian.

It was suggested by one Catholic school administrator in a participating school that non-Catholic parents would be very cautious about having their children participate in any study which singled them out for their opinion. Another school administrator suggested that the low participation rate might have been due to the general apathy of high school students.

The result of the above highlights the difficulty in researching the issue on non-Catholic students in Catholic schools at least in so far as such research has been attempted in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Given the ethical parameters of the study participants were not asked why they did not wish to participate and therefore their reasons are unknown. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that some Catholic school administrators are not overly supportive of research dealing with non-Catholic students in their schools as such research involves publicly acknowledging the Otherness of the non-Catholic students when what is sought is inclusion.

Emerging from the combined studies and the interviews were two dominant themes: the importance of the non-Catholic family’s commitment to its own religion, or the lack thereof, and the non-Catholic family understands of faith and religion.

PART III
Methodology, Methods, & Emergence

Methodology

The methodology chosen for both studies was objectivist Grounded Theory as described by Charmaz (2000) and interpreted by Glaser (1998). Charmaz (2000) describes grounded theory methodology as being split into two schools: objectivist and constructionist (p. 150).

Charmaz’s position often comes close to traditional positivism, with its assumptions of an objective, external reality, a neutral observer who discovers data, reductionist inquiry of manageable research problems, and objectivist rendering of data. Strauss and Corbin’s stance assumes an objective external reality, aims toward unbiased data collection, proposes a set of technical procedures, and espouses verification (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 510). Glaser (1992) holds that rigidity is inherent in the quantitative paradigm due to its dependence on an a priori research question, strict and prescriptive operating procedures, and its stress on validity and verification of the emerging theory and hypothesis. That is why he and his former acolyte, Strauss, developed grounded theory. Thus he eschews this methodology which he calls “full conceptual description” (p. 2). He argues for his version which stresses that the research question
emerges from the data a posteriori and that there must be great flexibility in the process of researching wherein the researcher receives guidance from the participants. It is this consonance with basic qualitative “flexibility of method” and indeed conceptualizing that leads to the discovery of understandings and beliefs within the context of the participants’ life world. He holds this to be of utmost importance for both research and to the development of theory. He further argues that to focus on process methodology rather than the development of theory from the data is wrong- headed and in fact not “true” grounded theory (p. 6). In effect, it is suggested that his position is reminiscent of the advice to the caterpillar that it ought not to focus on its number of legs or how they move in sequence but on the experience of walking. Glaser (1998) holds that this focus on procedures and method forces data into categories. This “forcing is a normative projection, a learned preconception, a paradigmatic projection, a cultural organization . . . . As the intolerance of confusion increases so does forcing” (pp. 81-82). His contention is that “all is data” is lost when one focuses upon the process of coding and creating categories.

In prematurely focusing on a theoretical code, such as pacing, or a unit, then researcher becomes lost in description instead of generation of theory with theoretical completeness . . . . Focusing only on one unit fosters (1) the quantitative canons of evidentiary research linked with time and place, such as verification, not generation, and (2) making a false distinction between quantitative and qualitative research. (p. 85)

As aforesaid, I chose to employ the objectivist school of grounded theory as posited by Glaser.

Methods
The method employed in Study # 1 was tape-recorded structured interviews of each of the ten participants. The interviews were guided in part by a series of questions which were closely aligned to those used by the researcher four years earlier during interviews with Catholic students at the same school (Donlevy, 2003b). Each conversation lasted approximately one to one and one-half hours and was transcribed. Thereafter, transcripts of the conversations were mailed to each participant for their perusal and further commentary. Concurrent with the above, once having completed the telephone interviews, each audio-tape was heard twice before any writing. Thereafter notes on each interview were made by the researcher.

Study # 2 was to have employed focus groups research (Beck, Trombetta, & Share, 1986, p. 73; Vaughn, 1996, p. 16) but, as aforesaid, the low participation rate made that impossible—except within one school. Hence in all but that case the research proceeded with individual interviews, ranging in duration from one to one and one-half hours. In one case a face-to-face interview was video taped but in the remainder of cases the interviews proceeded via telephone, lasting approximately the same time in duration.

The analysis of the accumulated data proceeded as with Study #1 with the sole exception that the video taped focus group interview in Study # 2 allowed for an analysis of the non-verbal interaction of participants while another participant was speaking.

Emergence
Once having completed the interview, each tape was reviewed twice before any writing. Thereafter the recordings were transcribed by me stopping and starting the tapes to grasp what was being said, how it was being said, and making marginal editorial comments as the process progressed. I sought to understand what was being said not only verbally but also emotively in the voices of the participants’. I chose particularly significant moments which seemed so due to the emotive expressions of the participants and the language employed by them in responding to posed questions. I focused upon the following questions. Were verbal emotional movements repeated by the participants? Were the usages of expressions consistent or were multiple meanings expressed? Were expressions spoken of with emotional intensity and if so, was it consistent with the appropriate text? Which ideas were expressed articulately? Were some ideas avoided by the participants as evidenced by their vocal cues? Was agreement or disagreement evident amongst the participants with respect to an idea? The above questions represented the criteria for determining the meaningful and significant events in the taped sessions.

Following the above process, a professional transcriber was retained to type out the audio portion of the tapes. Thereafter the texts of those transcripts were compared with the researcher’s earlier notes. It was clear that the transcriber’s text alone would not have been sufficient to gain an understanding of the participants’ ideas as the intonation of voice used by a participant was important in determining the significance as viewed by the participant regarding their
responses. In the case of the single focus group in Study # 2, the visual cues expressed by non-verbal participants in response to verbal participants’ ideas, at times during the session, was very valuable in discerning the group’s understandings. The initial analysis of the data by me and further analysis using the transcriber’s text represented the micro-analysis stage of the analysis.

Following the above analysis simple tentative categories of participants’ ideas were created which related significant and meaningful ideas expressed in the transcripts for which the verbal data provided concurrence. Negative concurrence was noted. This axial coding took into account the contingencies of time and space as well as continua along which a word was used and produced a “thickness” to those categories.

Selective coding followed the above, which related the categories to each another: i.e. Theme “A”: The Non-Catholic Family, Theme “B” Faith and Religion. A further review of the tapes provided depth of data to those categories after which followed a linking of the various unified categories into broader concepts which in turn were inter-related where it appeared to be reasonable to do so. In particular, under Theme “A”, The Non-Catholic Family, categories emerged from the pools of participants which related to certain similarities amongst various sub groups of participants and their families. Also, under Theme “B”, Faith and Religion, there emerged categories which dealt with existential similarities amongst students in terms of the faith related and both subliminal and long lasting effects of having attended a Catholic high school.

PART IV
Emergent Themes
As stated earlier, the common emergent themes from both studies were: the significance of the religious commitment of the non-Catholic family, and the non-Catholic students’ understanding of faith and religion. It is important to stress that the number of participants upon which these themes have been made is very low in number. Therefore, until more studies have been completed with a much larger pool of non-Catholic students the findings must been seen as tentative. Nevertheless, the findings appear to have some intuitive validity and are offered to the reader as matters for discussion and issues for further research.

Theme A: The Non-Catholic Family
The Emergent Categories.
The participants in Study # 1 and Study # 2 come from eclectic religious backgrounds: Mennonite, Lutheran, Evangelical, agnostic, and atheistic. Although the number of participants is small it seems reasonable to categorize their families based upon the data: Category A, committed Christian families; Category B, non-committed Christian families, Category C, non-religious families. For the purposes of this study Category A – “committed Christian families” – were of Protestant faiths, were regular attendees at their Churches’ religious services, and religion was seen as important within their homes. Category B – “non-committed Christian families” – were nominally Christian, were Protestant in faith where religion was not normally mentioned or discussed within their families; nor was religion seen as relevant on a daily basis to the lives of those within the family. Category C families were neither atheist nor agnostic but rather saw religion as irrelevant to their lives and thus not worthy of consideration. These categories emerged from the student participants within the research.

It would have been helpful to have had a fourth category of participants, committed non-Christian families (i.e.: Islamic families), but unfortunately no such student participants were available for this study. A major limitation in Study # 2 was the lack of a single participant who fell into Category C. That anomaly is difficult to explain, however, its existence lends weight to the argument that the participants’ commentaries in Categories A and B carry more probative weight than those in Category C.

Students who came from committed Christian families, Category A, had all attended at least some years of Catholic elementary school before entering the Catholic high school. They felt comfortable with the sign of the cross and the language used at school liturgies, at school Mass, and in Christian Ethic’s classes. As one student in Study # 1 said “We know the lingo.” Their families had oriented them towards an acceptance and respect for matters of faith and hence they felt comfortable when those issues were raised in the school. There were positive reasons for their attending Catholic high school, continuity with elementary school friends, a level of comfort with knowing what to expect in terms of a religious atmosphere, and support from their parents in that decision.
My religion is important to me and my family. We go to church on Sundays as a family and I attend the youth group where we pray and socialize with one another. It’s good to be able to talk about Jesus and religion in school because we spend so much time there and it’s not politically correct or cool [to talk about God] in public schools (Category A, Study # 1).

You know, even though I disagreed with a lot of things said in Christian Ethic’s class, I think just being there and hearing the Catholic point of view makes me stronger in my own religion (Category A, Study # 2).

Another student said,

I like going to the Catholic services in the school. They give me time to think about God and to see that other students think about Him too! It is a good time to just pray together during the day (Category A, Study # 1).

Category B students came from families which were nominally Christian where matters of religion and faith were not normally discussed in their homes and hence the students saw religion and faith as having importance—at best—on the periphery of their lives.

We don’t really go to church but we believe in God. Life is just too busy to go to Church and that stuff but we are good people and like we know about God (Category A, Study # 2).

It’s fine to go to the services [school Masses and liturgies] as its part of the deal to go to the school, but religion is not a big thing in my family. The services are boring. I mean, I respect the Catholics—but lots of the Catholic students act up in those services and so like – they must be bored too! I wouldn’t go if I wasn’t told that I had to go (Category A, Study # 1).

My friends are mostly Catholic and so it’s okay to go to school church services with them. Where else would I go? They are my friends and I have to go to this school (Category A, Study # 2).

Category C students’ families, as related by the participants, were indifferent to matters of faith and religion and the participants from those families were either indifferent or antagonistic to the Catholic expectations in the school. The latter emotion seemed based upon a feeling of exclusion from aspects of certain church based liturgies.

I came to the Catholic school because it was close to my house. Religion didn’t matter—it was just easier than having to get up earlier and ride a bus to school. Besides, some of my friends were going to the school. We don’t really have a religion (Category A, Study # 1).

I really don’t care about the Church services at the school. I would rather be shooting [basketball] hoops or something else but it’s only an hour so it doesn’t matter (Category A, Study # 1).

The teachers talked a lot about including everybody and about how we should care about the poor and others but when it came to making me feel like I was one of the group—like I could do everything that Catholic students could do I was excluded. That’s not right and I am still mad at the hypocrisy of it all (Category A, Study # 1).

You know, I would send my kids to a Catholic school but I would really be careful to make sure that they didn’t feel excluded from things. I felt that way sometimes—like at Mass—and so I would be careful about that with my kids. I am not sure what I would do but I would do something to fix that feeling (Category A, Study # 1).

In sum, it seems fair to say that the religious commitment of the non-Catholic student’s family may be a predictor to the type of experience the non-Catholic student may have in the Catholic high school at least in so far as religion is experienced.

Theme B: Faith and Religion
The distinction between religion and faith in Catholic high school students’ minds is not new. Religion is seen by many students as rules, and thus that which compels, where as faith is that which understands, experiences, and empathizes giving existential meaning to the individual (Donlevy, 2006a).

This is consistent with Nuzzi’s (2004, p. 68) finding that for Catholic students it is orthopraxis which is of most importance to their religious experiences in Catholic school.
It is the relevance to the adolescent of orthopraxis over orthodoxy (Rummery, 2001) which has led to the tendency of some in Catholic education to have great concern with respect to the Catholic school catering almost exclusively to that preference (Ratzinger & Messori, 1985, pp. 72-73; Ratzinger, 1996, p. 126). Perhaps this is understandable as a “method of avoidance” (Rawls, 1987) in the postmodern world in order “to neutralize potential conflicts and to promote democratic social harmony” (Hollenback, 1996, p. 93). However, Ratzinger (Ratzinger & Messori, 1985) states, “The result . . . has been a disintegration of the sensus fidei in the new generations, who are often incapable of a comprehensive view of their religion (pp. 72-73). That view has its proponents (Hitchcock, 1995, Caldecott, 1998), and opponents (Hastings, 1996). It seems that the dichotomy may rest upon a false sense of incommensurability which John Paul II (1998) eschewed.

The Non-Catholic Students’ Experiences

The students in both studies had what seemed, at least to this researcher, a rather strange understanding of the word faith. All participants saw faith as a belief which was free of content. It was not necessarily associated with the concept of God but rather it was associated with trust that succor would be available in time of need. As one student stated, “it’s just a belief that something’s going to work or is going to help you . . . its something you turn to or look to in times [when] you need help.” Another said, “faith . . . would be like the idea or concept that you believe in something whether or not you have proof. You can put your trust in [it]—draw strength from [it]”. In another sense one participant saw faith as “more of the application of religion” and another, “religion is really something that [takes] your faith to the next level . . . its another aspect of faith.”

The Catholic school was perceived as being supportive, challenging, and providing a safe and secure environment to discuss matters using the concept of God without fear of ridicule or being perceived as politically incorrect.

A participant from that group (Category A, Study #1) stated the following regarding prayer, liturgies, and Mass in the school:

> there was a Christian influence there and its something important to me . . . you can talk about [God] without being afraid [of] political incorrectness. . . [of being] offensive to someone else. . . . That’s an issue nowadays . . .

what if there is someone in the room who isn’t a Catholic or Christian?

Another (Category A, Study #1) related how she felt about Morning Prayer in the school, “the more that you’re exposed to that [the idea of God] the more you’re reminded [of God]. Whether its through morning prayer or Mass . . . I think that helps bring you back on to the right path, it’s a reminder about what’s important

A third student (Category A, Study #2) stated that having prayer, liturgies, and Mass in the school,

puts or tries to put the emphasis on something else [rather than the secular]. I think that it gives people sort of something else to think about besides the normal stuff, bigger and more important than just . . . grades.

A student from a home where religion was nominally important (Category B, Study # 1) stated: “the [in-school religious] services were boring.” Whereas another participant (Category C, Study #1) whose family eschewed religion, Category C, and attended the Catholic high school because it was closer to his home than a public high school stated,

> Everyone went up to get communion and there would be like ten of us sitting there and everyone would look at all of us because we didn’t get up. How exclusive can you be! I mean it’s horrible to like sit . . . and everyone just looks at you like you’re crazy I’m definitely angry at my four years [in Catholic high school] . . . very, very angry.

Although the above was an extreme reaction to exclusion from communion, the feeling was to a lesser degree present amongst all of the participants “some of them [my friends] felt a little left out during the Mass.” This finding differs, in part, from Seeley’s (2000) finding that of the non-Catholic students she interviewed, “none felt excluded for their religious beliefs” (p. 82). Only one of the students in Study # 2 felt some discomfort at being unable to participate fully in the Mass. Importantly, in both studies, any sense of exclusion came not from the marginalization of the non-Catholic students’ religious beliefs but rather from the students’ exclusion from full participation in the Mass, notwithstanding the option of receiving a blessing from the celebrant.

All but one student in the studies stated that
although the school provided the opportunity and prompting for an encounter with the religious or spiritual aspects of life, ultimately it was up to the student to choose to enter into that encounter. As one student said, “I think it’s whether you want to take the opportunity of the Catholic high school or not.” Another student stated, “I opted not to immerse myself in it” (Category B, Study # 1).

**Lasting Effects**

Seeley (2000) found that “most of the participants’ responses to questions about Catholicism as a formal religion were either negative or neutral” (p. 85). This study’s findings concur with that finding. However, it is an interesting phenomenon that two of the ten participants chose after graduation to work as teaching assistants in Catholic high schools. That may speak to the lasting effects on some non-Catholic students of having attended a Catholic high school. One of the students comes from a religiously committed family but the other does not. Their comments are as follows:

Nobody’s forcing you to talk a certain way, think a certain way . . . but you know it’s an impact whether or not you notice it (Category A, Study # 1).

Perhaps like a plant. It doesn’t think about the fact that there’s water or that there’s sunlight, but its there and its affected by it. [It has] to have some affect because you know, just a lot of times you’re learning how to relate to other people . . . how to converse and get along . . . through Catholic morals and it probably has a bit of an effect that you don’t even realize (Category B, Study # 1).

A third student from a religious home noted the lasting effects of attending a Catholic school.

Catholic high school helped me discover who I was. It helped me—like kind of being all by myself [as a non-Catholic in a classroom] it helped me deepen my strength and it helped me deepen my relationship with Christ and it helped me ask those questions that I’d never asked before but I wanted to ask . . . . It really helped me to strengthen my relationship with Christ (Category A, Study # 1).

A fourth student was asked by the researcher, “Did going to a Catholic high school affect your faith?” The student responded, “Yes, definitely. You’re taught in a way that you develop yourself spiritually” (Category A, Study # 1).

One student in Study # 2 stated in relation to this topic, “I became more accepting of others beliefs and stopped thinking everyone else was wrong and so going to hell except us in our church” (Category A, Study #2).

A student in Study # 2 said “I got to wear my belief in Jesus on the outside of my heart in school” (Category A, Study #2).

One finding of Study #1 is that if the non-Catholic student’s family was in Category A or B there was a possibility that four years of exposure and immersion in religious symbolism, rituals, and language would have a positive spiritual effect, perhaps subliminal in nature, upon that student which might become evident within a few years of graduation.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings of this research are that (1) the non-Catholic family’s religious commitment, or the lack thereof, appears to be significant in determining the nature of the religious experience of the non-Catholic student in the Catholic high school, (2) the students in Categories A, B, and C of the studies understood faith as experience rather than content with religion providing the latter, (3) students in Categories A and B in both studies found support for their religious beliefs within their Catholic high schools, and (4) it appears that students in Categories A and B in Study # 1 having graduated from a Catholic high school may be subliminally effected by its espoused values after graduation.

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*Journal of Religious Education* 56(4) 2008  37
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*Dr. J. Kent Donlevy is Associate Professor, Graduate Division of Educational Research, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. He is also the Editor of the International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning.
The Religious Participation and Spiritual Development of Young People in Catholic Schools: A Longitudinal View

Abstract
This paper reports on the first phase of a six year longitudinal study of the spiritual development of young people aged 11-17 years that attend Catholic schools in the Northern NSW Diocese of Lismore, Australia, and in the Diocese of Galway, Ireland. The project is investigating the factors that shape and influence the spiritual lives of these young people, with a particular focus on the students’ perceptions of Catholic schooling. Survey and interview data from year 5 primary school students in both Australia and Ireland indicates secure and confident children, who are proud of their religious affiliation. However, in Australia, these children rarely participate in religious practices outside the school. This is in contrast to the religious practice of Irish students. With the exception of a few highly committed individuals, it emerged that most students held a strong Deistic conception of God, and moreover, expected that they would most likely become “less religious” as they moved across the transition from Primary to Secondary School.

Introduction
One of the most important factors for developing children’s spiritual lives, and conveying religious tradition has been the family of origin (Bendroth, 2002; Dudley and Dudley, 1986; Meyer, 1996). Contemporary Western societies, however, present challenges to the transfer of beliefs and values to a younger generation for many so-called mainline religious groups (Davie, 1994; Kelley and de Graaf, 1997). For many young people, the process of maturation is closely allied to a move away from conventional religious expression - a process that often also reflects what is occurring in the family home (Bellamy et al, 2002; Dixon, 2003; Kay and Francis, 1996). How to address this drift away from conventional belief and practice by young people is a significant challenge for mainline Churches (D’Antonio et al 2001; Smith et al 2002). A key dimension of the response of mainstream Churches to encouraging the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents has been the development of extensive denominational school systems (Dijkstra and Veenstra, 2001; Fahy, 1992).

Key Terms
The terms “religious” and “spiritual” can often be nebulously defined, and at times conflated in the literature. Mason (2004, p. 4) has criticized previous attempts at all-embracing definitions of spirituality that do not take into account the combination, and relative weighting of the three different “threads of meaning” (philosophical, ethical and religious) which contribute to the term “spirituality”. When using such terms in the context of a research project, the argument is advanced that only a “stipulative” definition can provide the requisite research focus. The Australian Spirit of Generation Y Project has previously defined spirituality as define spirituality as:

a conscious way of life based on a transcendent referent. Our definition is not lexical—it does not claim to sum up the way everyone uses the word, nor is it essential, aiming to establish definitively what spirituality is. Rather, it is stipulative, stating what the term spirituality shall mean in our project.

(Singleton, Mason & Webber, 2004, p. 250).

In light of the comments above, and given the research objectives outlined below, this Project’s use of the term “spirituality” aligns with that of Singleton, Mason and Webber, and in addition, uses the term “religious” to refer to aspects of the Catholic faith tradition, whether they be “religious practice”, or “religious doctrine”. As a result, for the purposes of this study, the terms “religious” is hierarchically nested within the wider, stipulative use of the term “spiritual”. This is also consistent with Mason’s argument on the situation of the term “religious” as against “spiritual”:
**Spirituality**, in the traditional context, largely overlapped with religion. In contemporary society, where religious themes have begun to become available 'unbundled' from particular traditions and communities, 'spirituality' has come to be quite widely understood in a much more individualistic mode: self-constructed rather than simply accepted from one's religious tradition; free to borrow from various traditions, but separable from religion, and at times reacting against it – an alternative to religion (Marler & Hadaway 2002, Fuller 2001). It becomes possible for young people to have a very low level of involvement in organised religion, but still to view spirituality positively. (Mason 2004, p. 13).

The aim of the project is to investigate the role Catholic religious practice and doctrine plays in shaping the spiritual lives of young people aged 11-17 years in Catholic Schools and identify practices, programs and opportunities that Catholic schools might engage to better nurture and develop the faith lives of their students. It also provides a unique vehicle for students to express their views about Catholic schools and religious education within the school. The project also builds upon and extends earlier research undertaken in the Lismore Diocese (Rymarz & Graham 2004, 2005). The study also aims to provide a degree of comparison between the development of spirituality and religious practices of students in Australia and Ireland and has the following objectives:

1. To provide a detailed, baseline, descriptive mapping of the religious and spiritual practices, beliefs, experiences, histories, concerns and involvements of young people aged 11-17 years in Catholic schools in the Lismore Diocese.
2. To analyse over time the importance of influences that shape the spiritual lives of young people - as expressed in their beliefs about themselves and their family, school, God, and relationship. The role Catholic schools play in this development of the student beliefs is an important area of focus.
3. To enable the voices of young people themselves to inform discussions about what may work best in nurturing their religious and spiritual needs and experiences.
4. To inform teachers, parents and local educational systems about what, how and why Catholic religious experiences are important to young people.
5. To identify gaps and opportunities in educational practice concerning the transmission of faith and values.
6. To identify the significance of parental and family religiosity and spirituality on the understandings, beliefs and practices of young people.

This longitudinal study focuses on the development of student attitudes towards religion and their spiritual lives as they progress through Catholic schools. The participants in this study are, therefore, not a representative sample of Australian or Irish Year 5 students and in this sense the study is not comparable to other work in the field (Singleton et al 2004; Smith and Denton, 2005). The study seeks to gain a better understanding of changes in students over time. A special area of interest is the transition from primary to secondary schools.

**Method**

**Survey**

This first year of the project employed three data collection instruments, (i) a survey, (ii) focus group interviews, and (iii) individual interviews. The questionnaire-based survey was of Year 5 students in 8 Primary schools in the Diocese of Lismore (n= 146). All year 5 students with parental consent in each school were given the opportunity to participate. In addition to parental consent, a student consent form in plain language was explained to the students by the researchers, and signed by the students prior to administering the survey.

Follow up surveys of the same students will then be conducted in Year 7 (2007), Year 9 (2009), and Year 11 (2011) in the four Secondary schools in the Diocese into which the Primary schools feed. Although at this stage only the first cohort of 2006 year 5 students will be followed through to year 11. An anonymous coding system was employed to enable the tracking of participants, both (i) within a year’s data collection (i.e. completed survey, participated in focus group, and participated in individual survey); and (ii) longitudinally to track participants through the various grade levels.

There is some minor variation as to when a young person should be considered an “early adolescent” as opposed to a “pre-adolescent”. This project took its age range of 10-17 to include early adolescence, based on the literature established in the mid 1990s surrounding what is known as the “Middle Years” of schooling. The Report of the Junior Secondary
Review in South Australia identified the age and year level for young adolescents from 10-14/15 years of age (Eyers, Cormack & Barratt, 1993), while Fleming (1993) considered 12-15 year-olds as middle years students. Cumming (1993, p. 7), includes the range 10-15 years in early adolescence.

The survey drew upon the Smith and Denton (2005) instrument use in the American National Study on Youth and Religion (NSYR) for general measures in areas such as religious practice and conceptions of the nature of God. Other items in the survey were designed to gather data on the effectiveness of specific local religious education activities within the school. A pilot survey was conducted in two schools before the final form of the survey was developed, which asked students questions under the sections:

(i) Yourself,
(ii) Your Family,
(iii) Your School,
(iv) Your Church,
(v) Your Beliefs.5

Focus groups
The Focus Groups were conducted with 8-12 students from 8 primary schools in the Diocese. These same students will be followed up in 2007, 2009 and 2011. The Focus Groups were used in conjunction with the interviews and survey to (i) check the reliability of claims students were making in the surveys, and (ii) ascertain the extent to which information given in the presence of the peer group differed from information given in the privacy of an individual interview.

Interviews - Sampling considerations
The selection of participants for the focus groups, and more importantly, the individual interviews is potentially the weakest methodological link in the project. Given that the project was commissioned as a longitudinal examination of student in Catholic schools, the foremost criteria was a strong parental indication that their year 5 student would matriculate to a Catholic Secondary School. This was identified through the parental consent forms, and with the assistance of the School Principals. The next most important criteria was to allow for the range and depth of religious experience and practice in which different students participated. For the focus groups, participants were selected by the researcher as students completed the survey. Students who were clearly either highly engaged or disengaged with the survey were identified, and asked to join the group discussion. The classroom teacher was also asked to identify six students, two of each who were from “very religious”, nominally religious” and “not religious” families respectively. Given that only 4 individual interviews were conducted for each school, selection against the criteria of range of religious background became even more problematic. It proved quite a challenge to juggle these criteria with the (at times) competing criteria of “articulation” – finding students who would engage with the one-to-one dialogue needed for the interviews to be successful. As mentioned in the introduction, this sample is not representative of Australian children in year 5.

Interview methodology
The focus of the interviews was to allow the narratives and experiences of the students to emerge naturally and also to add depth to the survey data. Following Singleton and his colleagues, neither the survey or the interview mentioned the term “spirituality” directly. Singleton et al. (2004, p. 253) explain that narratives are more naturally elicited through the recounting of personal experiences and stories, rather than directly asking students “What do you feel about X?” However, we utilized a technique that seems to have effectively combined the elicitation of personal narrative with a more focused stem question (Tuohy & Cairns, 2000).

Rather than asking “What do you feel about X?”, the stem question is phrased “What do young people like you feel about X?”. This subtle yet important difference had the effect of providing students with the choice to either answer the question for themselves personally, or avail themselves of a little comfortable distance, and talk about how “young people in general” felt or thought. Invariably, whenever the student started out talking about what “young people such as themselves” felt, by the end of their answer they had come around to speaking about their own experiences directly. Being a “spokesperson” for young people like themselves gave them the time to feel comfortable with the question, and explore it from a few different perspectives at a safe distance. Indeed, this strategy also made room for the students to make some interesting comparisons between what they thought personally, and what they perceived was the experience of their peers.

Consistent with the usage discussed earlier, in contrast to the term “spirituality”, the term “religious” was directly mentioned and referenced.
in both the interviews and the survey, as one of the project goals is to access the students’ conceptions of how religious they felt their families and schools were compared to other families and schools they knew about.

**Parent Focus Group**
Although not employed in this first phase, in subsequent years, the Parents of students completing their first year of Secondary school will be invited to participate in their own focus group to identify their perception of the family and other factors that influence their child’s religious and spiritual development.

**Results and Discussion**

**High level of satisfaction, safety, and general well being**
The first strong theme to emerge from the data was that of the students being a very happy, well adjusted group of early adolescents. Seventy six percent of children had both Mother and Father living at home. Participants in this study indicated a very strong bond with their parents. Ninety two percent of respondents, for example, either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that they were happy in their family, and just under 90% either strongly agreed or agreed that they got on well with their parents. They were able to talk things over with their parents, told their parents if something good or bad happened to them, enjoyed doing things with their parents. Ninety three percent either agreed or strongly agreed that their parents showed that they were loved. This indicates support for the findings of the NSYR study (2005) that parents are a more important formative influence than the peer group. Parents seem a far more important formative agent when compared to friends. This is not saying that friendship is insignificant but rather that the parental link is crucial and formative.
The children in this study seem to have achieved a level of balance in their lives. Most describe themselves as happy, with a range of interests and a number of good friends. They have a number of adults they can turn to in times of need. There were a range of indicators that participants felt empowered in their own lives. When asked if they could change their lives over 80% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Only five respondents disagreed with this. They do not appear to be overly effected by peer group pressure. Whilst over 80% of respondents said they had many friends and 60% saw themselves as part of the popular group at school, only 20% saw it as important to fit in with their friends.
Similarly, the children in this study expressed a high level of satisfaction with the school they attended. School was a place where they felt safe and happy. Eighty three percent either agreed or strongly agreed that they got on with their teachers.

On the face of it, this bodes well for the environment that Catholic Primary Schools create. The students in these schools felt safe, valued, and respected by both their peers and teachers, and attending school was seen as a worthwhile and important thing to do.

**High level of religious practice in school**
School was also a place characterized by a relatively high level of religious practice. The school day was marked by activities such as prayer services both whole school and in class groups. Students had the opportunity to take part in school masses as well as reconciliation. Many students did not endorse these activities as evidenced by the relatively high level of unsure responses to questions about the whether they liked school masses, class masses or class prayer. At the same time most students did not express dissatisfaction with these events. As interview respondents put it they saw these activities as part of the fabric of school life and not something that they saw as foreign or extraneous to their understanding of what school should be about. What happens to responses in this area is a matter of ongoing interest as there is evidence that as children mature their level of interest in religious ritual declines markedly (Kay & Francis, 1996).

**Religion class popular**
The strongest response from students about school life was in the area of religion class. Most students responded to positively to religion class and enjoyed learning about God and ethical issues, with stories about Jesus being the most popular type activity in religion class. This is a significant finding as numerous students have indicated that students in Catholic secondary schools have a less favorable view of religious education (Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002).
A key future area of interest in this study is what happens to participants when they leave the relative safety and intimacy of the primary school and move into the secondary school. The secondary school by its very nature is a much bigger place where students may feel more intimidated. In the primary school they spend the majority of their time with one teacher who knows them well and, in the experience of these researchers, such teachers place a high value on the religious aspects of school life. The primary school class teacher is the one who initiates class prayer, helps organize the liturgy and acts as a religious leader and mentor. What happens at secondary level, in terms of religious expression of the school is an area of ongoing interest. Jack, it seems, has obtained had a sneak preview of what lies in store from his sister:

*Do you think that high school will be as religious as your primary school?*

It will be less religious. Cause my sister goes to the high school as well and she says that the teachers are really strict and they don’t pay much attention to you. And she told me that they tell you to shut up. It gets a bit scary. And that might cause them to not be as religious or something those teachers. (Jack)

**Differences in Australian and Irish “out-of-school” religious practice**

*Australia - The School providing an opportunity to express students’ spirituality*

One way to conceptualize the school as a place of spiritual and religious expression is to contrast it with what occurs in the home (Smith & Kim, 2003). As mentioned above, quite high levels of satisfaction and happiness within the family at home were indicated by the students. However, in Australia, the family was not the place where children expressed their religiosity, certainly within the parameters of Catholic belief and practice.

When asked how often they read the Bible as a family, 57% replied “never”; 35% replied “sometimes”; and not one respondent replied that they read the Bible “a lot” as a family. Similar results were found for family prayer and mass attendance.
There was, however, a clear but quite small minority of families who were regular Mass attendees, and families very rarely prayed together or read the Bible. During individual interviews, it emerged that students from this small minority of regularly practicing Catholics were cognizant that they were doing something very different from their friends. However, for most students, it emerged that the School was providing opportunities for students to express, or ritualize their spirituality, opportunities that are not readily available at home. In this way, the religiousity of the School was a positive contributor to the development of the students’ spirituality.
Do you think you feel close to God?
Yeah

What makes you say that?
Cause I know that he is with me because people say that to me, they talk about it with Mrs Lewis in class.

Does Mrs Lewis remind you that God is with you?
Yep. Other people tell it all the time. That the Holy Spirit is with you.

Are there any other ways that you find yourself that you can feel close to God?
Doing the right thing. I feel like I have done something good. Even on the board when I do a maths question right. I feel good about myself.

Are there times in your life outside of school that you can feel close to God?
Not really. No not really.

(Zac)

Sally was articulate enough to identify and describe the interface between the “non-religious” students who attend a “religious” school:

What about your school, do you think your school is very religious?
Not very religious, but we have a strong religious belief, I mean some kids don’t really like going to church or anything or doing religion in school, but I think we have a pretty good religious belief [her emphasis]. The teachers teach us a lot about religion and help us in tests and stuff.

(Sally)

Sally’s comments indicate a conflation common to all participants of “religious” with “spiritual”. Her first use of “religious” above is consistent with the Project’s use of the term, whilst her phrase “religious belief” is clearly referring to the wider, stipulative definition of the term “spiritual”, as discussed earlier.

Ireland – high levels of ritualized practice
In clear contrast to Australia, Toughy noted that Irish children indicated much higher rates of participation in a range of religious rituals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Ireland (%)</th>
<th>Australia (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>been to Mass (on Saturday or Sunday)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been part of the choir or music Group</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>given money for people in need</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been an altar server</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been to confession or reconciliation</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worn religious jewellery</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read at Mass</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read prayers of the faithful</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outside of school in the last year, I have…

1. Score 0 for never, 1 for sometimes and 2 for a lot, average displayed as percentage

There are indications here of a strong cultural aspect in Ireland of going to mass as a family, rather than depending wholly on school, as is more the case in Australia. Consistent with the above was how Irish children ranked family participation in other religious practices as well. Perhaps the strongest commonality between Australia and Ireland here is that few Catholics in either country read the Bible together!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Ireland (%)</th>
<th>Australia (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My parents are religious people</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our family goes to Mass together</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We say grace at meal times</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We read the bible together</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We pray together</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Score 0 for never, 1 for sometimes and 2 for a lot, average displayed as percentage
Similar contrasts between Australia and Ireland were found with the religious symbols and artefacts in the home.

In our home we have…  | Ireland | Australia (1.)
--- | --- | ---
a family bible | 57 | 50
religious magazines | 30 | 18
a crucifix (cross) | 84 | 41
holy water | 87 | 10
holy pictures | 82 | 33

1. Score 0 for no, 1 for not sure and 2 for yes. (1 on the grounds that some will have it and others not)

In Australia, over 80% of respondents when they pray use their own words, when this is combined with the low number who recite prayers of the faithful, this may be indicative of a lack of familiarity with ritualized prayer. As indicated above, there were also few overt indicators of religious belief or practice in homes such as crucifixes, religious pictures or family Bibles. Classical Catholic devotions such as saying the rosary were rarely said. When asked directly if their parents were religious, over 50% of participants, however, responded with sometimes. This is suggestive of parents who will identify themselves as Catholic yet have a relatively low level of practice and affiliation (Rymarz, 2004; Dixon, 2004). While parents may see themselves as being relatively religious, the survey results indicate this is a reflection of a comparatively low baseline of belief and practice. Evidence of this mindset being reflected by the children in this study, can be found in their attitudes to God.

**Moralistic Therapeutic Deism**

Smith and Denton (2005) coined the term *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* to describe the religious views of American teenagers. There is strong evidence here that participants have a deistic understanding of God. Although most Australian children believe in God, and 73% are proud of their religion or religious tradition, they also believe that God is rather a distant figure. Most do not talk to God in the mornings (half never do) or before bed, and they do not pray much in groups apart from at school. In contrast, personal prayer to God in the morning or at bed time was much stronger with the Irish children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I talk to God…</th>
<th>Irl</th>
<th>Aus (2.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
at special times like Easter or Christmas | 71 | 57 |
at night when I go to bed | 62 | 39 |
when I get up in the morning | 51 | 26 |
when other people are sick or in trouble | 63 | 62 |
when I need something | 57 | 46 |
when I am in trouble | 51 | 40 |

2. Score 0 for never, 1 for sometimes and 2 for a lot, average displayed as percentage

Religion as something to “grow out of”

It seems that many of these year 5 students had a perception of religion as something that is good for when you are a little kid, but when you get to high school, and later in your adult life, you tend to “grow out of it”. Below, Ashley perceives a “tapering” of interest in things religious that corresponds with age:

Tell me a bit about the rest of your family.

How religious would you say they are?

Well mum and dad are actually Anglican. So, yeah that’s a bit of a wonky one. Um my sister is pretty into it because she is in year 3. Sam has just started kinder so he is really into it. And Joe because he is only 1, I don’t really know. My grandfather doesn’t really go to church that much.

(Ashley)
Interestingly, students wanted to maintain that it was possible to “grow out” of religion, yet at the same time preserve their claim that this did not diminish their spirituality. Across all students, there was a very high tolerance of widely varying levels of religious commitment within their family, and across their friends. They did not see it as either unusual or problematic that one of their parents was religious, while the other was not. Most were quite sanguine about this situation, and rightly saw it as quite common. For example, in Celia’s family, religious expression and participation were clearly driven by her father, because her dad is “fully” Catholic:

*Can you tell me a bit about religion and your family?*

My dad is fully catholic, my mum isn’t. Dad has been baptised, reconciliation Christ - I am, I don’t think my brother is, but I am pretty sure my sister is and my mum is pretty much the only one in my family that isn’t. But she still joins in if we decide to go to church at Christmas or Easter. She came to the church when I got my first Eucharist done…

(Celia)

**Beliefs about God**

*When God is close*

When asked where or when they feel closest to God, most participants (over 70%), said in Church. This may suggest that for many children God is a somewhat distant figure who is not closely connected to their lives but who can be found externally, in this case in a Church.

*What do you think are the differences that you notice between a school mass and a church mass?*

Mass outside of school seems more important because there are adults there and not so many kids. I’m not sitting next to my friends or anything.

*What do you think church mass feels different like that?*

Everything just seems so important there. It seems like a big thing. But in school mass it’s just my friends and stuff.

Experiences of nature were cited by the children as making them feel peaceful, but this was clearly a different thing to feeling that God was close.

*Can you tell me what sort of things make you happy and at peace?*

The other night I went out on my balcony and just looked at the moon and the clouds. I went out to see my dog and I looked at the sky and it just made me feel open…

(Jack)

For students in both Ireland and Australia, feeling close to God was associated with formal religious acts such as praying in school or being in Church – although feeling close to God in church was indicated more strongly by Irish children. This indicates the importance of Church, and that experiences of nature are not necessarily an equal substitute for Church when it comes to children feeling close to God.

*When God is far*

Children felt God was furthest away when they either disobeyed their parents or engaged in bad behavior. This may be another indication of the importance of parents in children’s lives. Respondents were most likely to talk to God when someone was sick suggesting a therapeutic sense of God as one to turn to when assistance is needed.

Another facet of Smith and Denton’s (2005, p. **) “moralistic therapeutic deism” emerged as children described their perceptions of the consequences of knowing God. A benevolent God who is quite ambivalent about wrongdoing was described by the students. While 71% said they were sure that God knew of their wrongdoings, only 17% said that God was likely to punish them if they did something bad. Fifty four percent stated that they did not think God punishes when they do something wrong. Indeed, the word “sin” was mentioned only once by one student:

*How important is praying to you?*

It’s pretty important in my life. I try to pray every night because it’s like another friend to talk to, to say how my day was. That I am sorry for my sins. And things like that.

(Jack)
In conclusion, the students in this study can be described as displaying a number of characteristics. They are generally happy and content. Parents are the most powerful formative influence, even more so than friends. This supports the findings of other researchers who have also highlighted the importance of family as formative influence (Hoge et al 1982; Meeus, 1996; Smith and Denton (2005). Whilst participants did not indicate antipathy to religious practice in the Australian students most families had low levels of ritualized religious practice. With Irish participants the level of practice was much higher. For the Australian participants the school is the main forum for overt religious practice such as attending Mass or communal prayer.

Another key difference between the Irish and Australian cohorts is the levels of personal and communal prayer amongst Australian patricians is lower than those of the Irish. The conception of God by both groups can be described as deistic in terms similar to that described by Smith and Denton (2005). As this project develops a number of future directions indicate themselves. Firstly, a key area of interest is the transition to Secondary School and how this impacts on expressions of religious and spiritual belief. Secondly, what influence the school has on expression of religious belief and practice. Finally whether the differences in pedagogy and approach between Primary religion classes and Secondary religion classes has any impact on religious expression.

References


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i The study was commissioned by the Catholic Education Office, Lismore, and involves the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University and the Australian Catholic University. The study has been approved by the Southern Cross University Ethics Committee (# ECN_07_14).

ii The survey instrument can be found online at http://www.ccyp.scu.edu.au/projects.html

*Dr Rymaz University of Alberta, Brad Shipway, Southern Cross University

* David Tuohy, National University Ireland, Galway

52 Journal of Religious Education 56(4) 2008
Religious Education and Methodology in the Post-modern age

Abstract
Post-modern shifts in educational methodology, which privilege discourse analysis and a multi-literate approach in the delivery of secondary education, have impacted strongly on secondary education in the last decade. The shift from a narrower view of literacy (Reading and writing) to Multi-literate approaches to education present serious challenges to the way in which Study of Religion is currently being taught in senior secondary schools. Furthermore, these shifts are arguably rendering phenomenological methodologies out-dated and less equipped to engage student potential for meaning-making. The context of this study is secondary school curriculum as determined by the Queensland Studies Authority. Also, references to Religious Education presuppose curriculum set by Brisbane Catholic Education. Consequently this study does reflect experiences associated with this very specific educational context. However, this study may have relevance to other systems in other Australian states and could generate pertinent conversations within those specific educational contexts.

Introduction
It is arguable that students in a post-modern context are struggling to make meaning in the post-compulsory subject Study of Religion in the present educational context. This may be due to the cultural assumptions that once underpinned the teaching of religion no longer being relevant in the post-modern context. Consequently the goal of this paper is to highlight where we have been when it comes to teaching religion in Catholic secondary schools and where we may need to go if we wish to more effectively engage student potential for meaning-making in Religious Education and Study of Religion.

Religious Education: Where have we been?
The history of Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in Australia has seen the development of various educational approaches aimed at more effectively engaging student potential for meaning-making at a particular point in history. Buchanan (2005) refers to this phenomenon as “Pedagogical Drift” (p. 20). There have been six key shifts in methodology in Religious Education over the last two hundred years. These are: the Doctrinal, Kerygmatic and Experiential approaches and the Shared Christian Praxis, Educational and Phenomenological approaches. Therefore, it is important to briefly revisit these six key shifts in order to provide a clearer context for the consideration of a change in methodology for teaching the post-compulsory subject Study of Religion in a post-modern context.

Exploring Pedagogical Shift
The Doctrinal Approach
Before the 1960s the emphasis in Religious Education was on rote-learning the official Catechism of the Catholic Church (Mannix, 1938, Foreword). The rote learning of Catholic doctrine was understood to lead to belief and socialisation into the Catholic Church. “The memorising of doctrine as a means to the internalisation of faith [was considered to be] the key element in this approach and dominated the landscape of religious education until the 1960s” (Fleming, 2002, p.63). A perceived weakness in the Doctrinal approach was its strong focus on teaching Catholic Christian doctrine to the detriment of highlighting the importance of sacred Scripture. The Kerygmatic approach sought to address this perceived weakness.

The Kerygmatic Approach
The Kerygmatic approach was implemented with emphasis upon “proclaiming the Good News” and the use of the Bible during Religious Education lessons (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.58). The Hebrew and Christian scriptures were given greater importance in Religious Education lessons.
Consequently, both Scripture and Doctrine were now presented as being just as important as each other in the faith development of children and adolescents in Religious Education in Catholic schools. However, lacking in this approach was an emphasis on the importance of human experience and of how God reveals God’s self not only in Scripture and Tradition but also in the ordinary events of life.

The Experiential Approach
The Second Vatican Council affirmed the view that God was not only revealed in past events, as recorded in Scripture and evidenced by Tradition, but also in the present events of ordinary life Dei Verbum made it clear that Scripture and Church Tradition were not sources of divine revelation per se but rather, witnesses to it (Flannery, 1984). Secondly, the emphasis on life experience in this approach was influenced by the disciplines of psychology and anthropology, which emphasised the importance of holistic personal development and the importance of community (Ryan, 1997, p.54). This assisted Religious Education teachers in the 1970s to address the perceived weakness in the Kerygmatic model – that the importance of religious experience as a key factor necessary for appropriate faith development was not always adequately accommodated.

It is important to note that these first three models of religious education were largely focused on faith development. The next three models that would emerge, while not disregarding the importance of faith development, would seek to more effectively integrate mainstream educational theory and practice with appropriate faith development. The Shared Christian Praxis approach would begin this process.

The Shared Christian Praxis Approach
The Shared Christian Praxis approach rather than being solely based on a theological and catechetical rationale, which was typical of the Doctrinal, Kerygmatic and Experiential models, was also influenced and shaped by critical educational theories. Thomas Groome, an American theologian and educator, was instrumental in developing this approach. Groome’s focus was to reframe Religious Education in such a way as to overcome the perceived inadequacies of the doctrinal and experiential or life-centred approaches (Groome, 1991). Consequently, this approach while still faith-centred sought to reframe Religious Education within the parameters of general educational theory and practice.

The Shared Christian Praxis approach encouraged students to reflect critically upon their actions and current events and make distinctions between what was “really happening” in the world and what was perceived as “should be happening” in the world (Engebretson, Fleming & Rymarz, 2002). Due to this change in emphasis the Shared Christian Praxis approach was deemed by Religious Education authorities in the 1980s to be more academically rigorous and challenging than earlier approaches (Groome, 1991, p.276). However, the Shared Christian Praxis model of religious education was not without its limitations. Ryan (1997, p.77) argues that in Australian schools the radical and critical dimensions of this approach were de-emphasised in favour of “aspects which [sought] to conserve and maintain the tradition”. Consequently, as a methodology it could be postulated that the Shared Christian Praxis model of religious education struggled to objectively critique theology and religious practice within the Catholic tradition.

As a consequence of this, critics of this approach expressed the concern that the Shared Christian Praxis model tended to be “a messenger for a prevailing Church theology” rather than a healthy critic of it and the Christian praxis that such a theology promotes (Ryan, 1997, p.78). Partly owing to these inherent limitations and due to shifts in education generally, the 1980s and 1990s were witness to further methodological shifts in religious education in Australian Catholic Schools. A key shift was from a Shared Christian Praxis approach to the Educational Approach that had a predominant academic and educational focus.

Educational Approach
The Educational approach to Religious Education placed emphasis on the educational components of religious studies (Buchanan, 2005, p.33). Rummery (2001), who was influenced by the work of Smart, was one of the first Australians to present a systematic view of the educational dimensions of religious education. A key question for Rummery (1975, p.27) was: Can we assume that students in Catholic schools are believers? This type of questioning contributed to the development of an Educational approach to Religious Education that combined catechesis and faith development with appropriate educational theory and practice.
Two streams of Religious Education emerge in Catholic secondary schools

A major shift in Religious Education in Australian Catholic schools was from a single stream of religious education focussing primarily on faith development, but incorporating educational theory and practice, to a second stream of religious education, which focused primarily on academic development. This second stream of religious education – Study of Religion - was based in phenomenological methodology and unlike the first stream of Religious Education did not have as one of its goals, catechesis. In the Phenomenological approach to teaching religion, religion per se was not studied for the purposes of faith development but in order to understand the role that religion occupied in the lives of people and culture (Fleming, 2002, p.73). The Queensland Board subject: Study of Religion utilised phenomenological methodologies for teaching religious content in the classroom.

Study of Religion

The Queensland Studies Authority subject, Study of Religion, when introduced into Catholic secondary schools in the mid 1980s, identified religion as a socio-cultural and historical phenomenon. As such, religion was deemed as warranting serious academic attention in Australian secondary schools. State Educational Authorities wanted Study of Religion to be viewed as legitimate a subject as those associated with other Key Learning Areas (Engebretson, 2002). As stated above this resulted in two streams of education in religion being offered to students enrolled in Catholic schools. As a result Senior students (Year 11 & 12) can currently choose to either enrol in Religious Education with a twofold emphasis on faith development and appropriate academic development consistent with an Authority registered subject. Or students can enrol in Study of Religion with the primary emphasis being academic development.

For some scholars phenomenology was considered a most appropriate methodology for assisting students’ meaning-making in the classroom as it identified religion as a legitimate object of study, which developed distinctive skills and encouraged particular insights relevant to the life-world of the student (Lovat, 2002, p.45). Post-modern shifts in educational methodology have impacted strongly on secondary education in the last decade. By Post-modern shifts is meant an intellectual shift from a universal discourse of reason and of empirical certainty to diversity. Whelan (1999) argues that reality is not objective but multifaceted and no single discourse or view of reality is pre- eminent over others. Consequently, methodologies that reflect the insights of Discourse analysis and of language deconstruction typify this period which extends from the 1960s to the present (Blake & Hamilton, 1995; Croft & Cross, 1997).

This intellectual shift presents serious challenges to the way in which Study of Religion is currently being taught in senior secondary schools. A strong theme within the literature has suggested that phenomenological methodologies for teaching Study of Religion are possibly outmoded and may reflect a modern rather than a post-modern context (Flood, 1999; Hobson & Edwards, 1999; Jones, 2003; Kay, 1997). Consequently, an historical overview of phenomenological methodologies is required in order to contextualise the issue of student meaning-making, and to demonstrate why, as a methodology, it may be struggling to engage student potential for meaning-making.

Phenomenology: A History

Origins of the Term

The term, “Phenomenology” was first coined in 1764 by Johann Heinrich Lambert, a Swiss-German mathematician and philosopher. It was derived from two Greek terms “whose combined meaning was the setting forth or articulation of what shows itself” (Moreau, 2001, p.1). Immanuel Kant, a contemporary of Lambert, also used the term to distinguish between “things” in the world as they appear to us (phenomena) from “things” in the world as they really are (noumena). It was out of this context that Chantepie de la Saussaye in 1887 (cited in Sharpe, 1975, p.222) coined the term “the phenomenology of religion” in Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte (Textbook of the History of Religions). Stimulated by the insights of Kant and later Hegel, Chantepie sought to underline the different and diverse manifestations of religion across common themes (Barnes, 2001).

Hegel

According to Boucher (2000), Hegel’s argument was that we are driven by a desire to really know the “nature” (noumena) of things, which he referred to as wesen or essence and that this knowledge is mediated through the social world - the world of appearances or manifestations (phenomena). Chantepie applied Hegel’s philosophical insight to the phenomenon of religion, identifying that while religion manifested itself concretely in the world as diverse, there was present within each world religion an essence (wesen) that was common to each. Therefore,
while the socio-cultural manifestation of religions may differ across contexts the essence of these same religions does not. This distinction between the essence of religion and its socio-cultural and historical manifestation was later pursued by a number of continental philosophers including van der Leeuw (1938), Otto (1958) and Husserl (1983).

**Husserl and Habermas**

Husserl, reacting to the dominant methodology of his day, empirical science, postulated that in order to truly come to know the essence of something there must be a suspension of judgement and a continuing openness to the object or phenomenon under investigation. Habermas (1985) later built on the thinking of Husserl and this is evident in his articulation of the epistemic distance between a phenomenon and the observer. Habermas (1985) argued that the critical knowing of the essence of phenomena comes through a lengthy process of observation and self-reflection. Cultural conditioning and presuppositions regarding particular phenomena can then be identified by the observer prior to final conclusions being drawn (Lovat, 2001). Consequently final conclusions would, arguably, be free of prejudice and bias. This assumption within phenomenology that things in the world possess an essence that make them what they are demands, according to Moreau (2001), that the observer rely on intuition in order to experience it and identify it.

This intuition is called “eidetic vision” or “eidetic reduction” (Moreau, 2001). Furthermore, this intuition enables the observer to see and understand a phenomenon in terms of its essence and not have that understanding adulterated by bias and prejudice due to the socio-cultural and historical conditioning of the observer. A key characteristic of phenomenology is the belief that objective meaning/truth is attainable. This belief in the possibility of objective truth is arguably influenced by empirical science, which made the same claim. However, the reliance on intuition or “eidetic vision” in order to discern the nature of a thing is arguably a weakness in a methodology that claims to be objective (Moreau, 2001). Therefore, the combination of “objectivity” and “intuition” may be a contradiction in terms. This is because the ability to demonstrate that one particular intuitive insight is more adequate than another is exceedingly difficult at best and impossible to prove empirically (Moreau, 2001).

Lovat (2005, pp.47-48), suggests that this apparent conflict between objectivity and intuition are not necessarily contradictory. According to Lovat (2005) this enables the observer to objectively assess a particular phenomenon by an extensive gathering of the views of others (data). This is without any judgements being made about the relative value or worth of the data itself – suspension of judgement. However, this notion is coupled with the idea that once an objective assessment has been undertaken, that the observer is then in a position to reflect critically upon this assessment and make informed judgements about the phenomenon under investigation. This is called “informed subjectivity” or “eidetic science”. Lovat (2005, p.48) suggests that at the eidetic science end of phenomenological methodology that intuition may be quite legitimate. This is because phenomenological methodology per se is a “movement across the spectrum from objectivity to informed subjectivity [eidetic vision]” (Lovat, 2005, p.48). Therefore, while Moreau (2001) posits that the combination of “objectivity” and “intuition” (subjectivity) within the one methodology is a contradiction in terms, Lovat (2005) argues that these two elements are simply opposite poles of the spectrum that is phenomenological methodology and that no contradiction exists.

**Developing a Methodology**

Applying this insight to secondary education it is important to note that phenomenology, when first proposed as a methodology for studying religion in the 1960s, was never intended as a teaching methodology for religious education in secondary schools. It was originally intended as an analytical framework for exploring religion as a sociological and historical phenomenon. Religious Studies departments in secular Universities later adopted phenomenology for this purpose (Flood, 1999). Before the Second World War, the study of religion took place in the domain of theological colleges and institutions whereby academics who were adherents of a particular religion would provide a pseudo-scientific rationale for particular doctrines held by a particular religious group primarily for that religious group (Flood, 1999, p.17). Flood (1999) has suggested that claims to the pre-eminence of a particular brand of religious truth over others, such as that espoused by Christianity, Hinduism or Islam, were considered highly questionable and deemed outside of the scope of scientific methodology to deny or confirm.

The establishing of Religious Studies departments within secular universities in the United States of
America and the United Kingdom during the decades that followed the Second World War marked an important shift in the way religion was studied. There was a movement away from theology, which was traditionally regarded as an insider discourse, to religious studies, which favoured a more academic and non-confessional approach to the study of religion. Flood (1999) states:

[That while] Institutionally theology and religious studies often find themselves in close proximity as there are many combined theology and religious studies departments in European (though not American or Canadian) universities, many in religious studies have perceived [this] separation . . . as a hard-won battle which has separated a confessional understanding of religion from a non-confessional, objective one (p.18).

Consequently in those institutions of higher learning where a clear delineation between theology and religious studies was made, Religious Studies departments adopted phenomenological methods of inquiry (Flood, 1999). This was in order to provide objective descriptions of religion from the position of an outsider rather than an insider of a particular religious group (Flood, 1999). The use of phenomenological methodologies also afforded Religious Studies departments in universities more credibility. This was because academics were able to claim a level of objectivity and empirical validity in the study of religion consistent with other tertiary subjects like Mathematics and Physics. Phenomenology as a tool for objectively analysing religion was pioneered by Ninian Smart (1968).

Ninian Smart
Ninian Smart was a Professor of Religious Studies at Lancaster University in England and is considered a “modern pioneer of Religious Studies” (Lovat, 1993, p.7). Smart (1968) assisted in developing a phenomenological approach that was later used within a university context of education and learning. By emphasising the importance of observing a religion as a concrete socio-cultural and historical phenomenon, Smart attempted to see what an adherent of a particular religion sees. This was to be achieved by entering the believer’s thought world and suspending judgement in order to reduce or ideally eliminate bias or presupposition regarding the religious phenomenon under observation.

For Smart this was crucial as it ensured that data collected would be sifted of all presupposition and bias and be truly objective. Hence, there would be neither endorsement nor criticism of what was observed, so preserving the Husserlian value of époche or the suspension of judgement (Smart, 1968). Smart argued that one comes to know religion by endeavouring to strip oneself of all presuppositions about it and by immersing oneself in the experience of it. This immersion would enable the observer to attempt to see what a particular believer of a particular religious tradition might see. The approach developed by Smart was founded on the theory that religion could feasibly be studied from the “outside”. That is, one does not have to belong to a religious tradition in order to learn about religion. It is out of this methodological approach that the seven dimensions of religion, now synonymous with Smart, were later developed as a way of examining and comparing particular religions within secondary education contexts. These seven dimensions are the ritual, experiential, mythological (stories), doctrinal (beliefs), ethical, social and material dimensions (Lovat, 1993, p.7; Ryan & Goldburg, 2001, p.8; Smart, 1968).

The British Experience
It is important to note that a move toward a phenomenological approach to teaching religion in secondary schools had its beginnings in Britain. Up until the 1960s the teaching of religion in British schools was largely “confessional” (Hull, 1984, pp.5-7). However, as the British population became more diverse and multicultural in its makeup, due to an increase in immigration, a new approach to teaching religion was developed. A number of Agreed Syllabuses in religious studies appeared in the late 1960s, with the central focus being Christianity. The “Birmingham Agreed Syllabus” and accompanying Handbook, which was published in 1975 was the culmination of this trend in religious education in Britain (Buchanan, 2005, p.30).

The “Birmingham Agreed Syllabus” was based on a phenomenological approach as proposed by Smart (1968). Consequently, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that phenomenological methodologies were adapted and then adopted for teaching religion in secondary schools in Britain then later in Australia. It needs to be stated that “Smart was not concerned with how religion should be taught in schools” but rather with “what content should be taught” (Buchanan, 2005, p.31). Moore and Habel (1982), two Australian
The Australian Experience

Moore and Habel (1982) developed a theory that demonstrated how the phenomenological approach of Smart could be implemented in the religion classroom – the Typological approach. Whereas Smart identified that any religion could be viewed as a collection of rituals, myths and doctrines et cetera, he did not provide a practical methodology for assisting students to approach a study in this way (Lovat, 2002). Smart identified the forest (The Seven Dimensions) but Moore and Habel identified the specific trees (Component parts of each Dimension) that make up the forest (Lovat, 2002). “For Moore and Habel, the types (or elements) of religion (i.e. rituals, myths, etc) make up the vocabulary …which must be mastered…for religious literacy to develop” (Lovat, 2002, p.52).

These types or elements were as follows: beliefs, sacred texts, stories, ethics, ritual, symbols, social structure and experience (Habel and Moore, 1982, p.71). The Typological approach utilises a technique that begins with components of the home tradition and emphasises the importance of a careful translation of these components to other religions (QBSSSS, 2001, p.11). For example, a focus on the belief component of religion might emphasise in Catholicism the Nicene Creed while in Islam it might highlight the seven cardinal beliefs of that religion (Crotty, Crotty, Habel, Moore & O’Donoghue, 1989; Lovat, 1993). Furthermore, the juxtaposing of component parts of different religions, such as two creeds or belief systems, allowed for a more effective comparison of them by students. The Typological approach was identified by the Queensland Studies Authority as a valid methodology for teaching Study of Religion alongside sociological, feminist, historical and phenomenological approaches (QBSSSS, 2001, pp.10-12).

It is important to acknowledge, however, that while Typological and Phenomenological methodologies are presented separately within the Study of Religion Syllabus, the former has its origins within the latter as stated earlier (Engebretson, 2002, p.10; Lovat, 2002, p.52; Ryan, 1997, p.105). Also, some secondary school textbooks for teaching Study of Religion have clearly adopted the Typological approach. An example of this is the text, “Finding a Way” (Crotty, Crotty, Habel, Moore & O’Donoghue, 1989). Anecdotal evidence would suggest that this text has been and continues to be used and consulted by Study of Religion students in Queensland schools.

Phenomenology and Study of Religion

During the 1970s and 1980s, state governments in Australia began to introduce state-accredited courses in religion in schools. These courses relied heavily upon the Phenomenological approach and the Typological approach and later gained popularity as a teaching methodology in Study of Religion in Queensland Schools (QBSSSS, 1995). This may have been because Phenomenology and Typology offered effective pedagogical frameworks for teachers to utilise when challenging students to compare religions (Ryan, 1997, p.105). Consequently, teachers found the seven dimensional framework of Smart and the eight-tiered typology of Moore and Habel effective pedagogical tools for teaching students about a variety of world religions.

According to the QBSSSS (2001, p.11) Smart’s approach to Study of Religion emphasised impartial observation and analysis without the influence of a person’s particular belief system. In other words the practice of Époche or the suspension of judgement was facilitated by using this methodology in secondary schools and was particularly attractive in a multi-cultural society such as Australia (Husserl, 1983). This was because one was challenged to avoid passing value judgements regarding particular religious beliefs and values that have often found strong endorsement within a particular ethnic group. For example, historically and culturally, Judaism has been strongly linked to the Jewish community while Islam has been strongly linked to the Arabic community.

Smart’s seven dimensional framework for teaching religion, which was identified earlier, constitutes what now will be referred to as Smart’s approach to teaching religion. In Britain further refinements to the use of phenomenological methodologies in secondary education, post the Birmingham Agreeed Syllabus, led to the seven dimensional framework developed by Smart (1968) being strongly endorsed by the British education system (Buchanan, 2005; Swann, 1985). Furthermore, material was later added to supplement this model late in the 1970s. This framework was deemed to be an effective pedagogical tool for teaching religion in British secondary schools and came to prominence in Australia during the early to mid...
An official British enquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups in 1985, “Education for all: Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups”, or as it was more popularly referred to, “The Swann Report”, gave unqualified endorsement to Smart’s interpretation of phenomenological methodology and its application to religious education in British Public Schools (Swann, 1985). This was consistent with the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, published in Britain in 1975, which stated that religious studies must be impartial between the religions and the secular ideologies that are the context of religion (Buchanan, 2005, p.30; Lovat, 2001). Due to such widespread support for this methodology, it was adopted as the preferred methodology for teaching religion in secondary schools in Britain. This was because it could accommodate religious difference without discrimination and was deemed particularly pertinent in Britain due to its multicultural mix.

The Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, due in part to the Australian teachers who were influenced by Smart and Australia’s multicultural mix, similarly endorsed the dimensions approach in Australia (Ryan, 1997). In 1982 the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (QBSSSS) trialled a matriculation course in Study of Religion. It was officially approved as a Board subject in 1989 and a revised curriculum was published in 1995 (Ryan, 1997, p.107). This curriculum largely employed Smart’s dimensional approach to teaching religion (Study of Religion Syllabus, 1995). Students were enabled to study a variety of religious views existing in their own local communities as well as “develop an appreciation of the beliefs, attitudes and values of others” (Ryan, 1997, p.107).

In 1991 the development of a discrete HSC subject in New South Wales, the Studies of Religion Syllabus, and in Victoria, Religion and Society (1994a) and Texts and Traditions (1994b), further attested to support for Smart’s dimensions approach (Hobson & Edwards, 1999, pp.147, 150, 153; NSW Board of Studies, 1991; Victorian Board of Studies, 1994, 1994a). This support was evident in an emphasis upon phenomenological methodologies within the various syllabi. By 1992 Study of Religion was offered in most Australian states as an elective matriculation course (Hobson & Edwards, 1999, p.147).

Phenomenological Methodologies in the Australian Context

Phenomenological methodology, as applied to religious education and Study of Religion in the Australian context, has viewed religion as a social and cultural phenomenon. Consequently, religion has been offered as an area of academic inquiry in secondary schools because it is an essential component of the world (Engebretson, Fleming, Rymarz, 2002). Australia, like Britain, is a multicultural society, home to an array of religious groups. Due to this social and cultural reality it has been deemed important that schools prepare students for this context, as it is an essential component of the social world that they are entering into as young adults. Consequently, teaching Study of Religion to students, which models for them a process that acknowledges religious differences between religious groups without encouraging discrimination is an important value to preserve.

Barnes (2001) postulates that phenomenology when applied to Study of Religion goes further than simply acknowledging religious difference. Barnes (2001, p.572) argues that phenomenology helps to reconcile differences by attempting to theologically reconcile the “great religions”. Phenomenology achieves this by describing each religion as manifestations of the same essential spirit or wesen, though the outward characteristics of doctrine, ritual and ethics particular to various religions may differ. Essentially, this type of approach could be deemed a cultural lens view of religion whereby images of the divine are understood to be the result of perceiving the same ultimate reality through various cultural lenses that are varying versions of belief in the same monolithic divine entity (Barnes, 2001; Hick, 1989, p.369). Hebblethwaite (1997, pp.138, 146) supports this notion when stating that various religions experience the same transcendent, ultimate reality “albeit under different guises” due to historical and cultural context.

McTernan (2002) elaborates on this notion and explains that images of ultimate reality are constructed within the boundaries of historicism established by culture and experience and that as a consequence there is no fixed foundational or normative location from which to develop truth claims about God (cf. Hartshorne, 2001; Whitehead, 1978). However, McTernan (2002) rejects a cultural lens view of religious plurality and proposes a radically different approach. McTernan’s approach signals a departure from
classicism and modernism, which presupposes a monolithic view of ultimate reality to post-modernism and its postulation of a Multilithic view of ultimate reality.

A Multilithic View of Ultimate Reality
It can be argued that the Multilithic approach espoused by McTernan (2002) has emerged out of a changed social world and thought world whereby diversity has been acknowledged but without the compulsion to explain such diversity away with a universalising theory. This, however, has been to some extent the practice of modernism (Boucher, 2000; Jones, 2003). Furthermore, it can be argued that approaches based on phenomenology, as applied to Study of Religion, have often been employed to explain diversity away by identifying a universal essence or wesen common to all religion types.

The post-enlightenment preoccupation with reason as the instrument for arriving at scientific certainty when confronted with a diversity of responses to the human question of origins, for example, has shown itself to be wanting in answers (Hall, 2003, p.3). Reason itself is now seen as a particular historical form, as parochial in its own way as the ancient explanations of the universe in terms of gods and demi-gods (Jones, 2003). However, phenomenological methods have not always registered this shift in thinking and have had a propensity to endorse a modernist discourse of reason rather than critically evaluate such a discourse. Discourse analysis methodologies register this shift in thinking and are arguably better positioned to enable students to make meaning in the post-modern secondary school classroom.

Discourse analysis methodology
The deconstruction of language as reflected in Discourse analysis methodologies is fast becoming a standard theoretical framework in the post-modern era of academic inquiry and educational theory. Discourse analysis methodologies have been adopted by the Queensland Studies Authority English Syllabus (2001) as the underlying framework for organising student learning in Year 11 and 12. Consequently, it could be postulated that the Study of Religion Syllabus (2001) and School work programs developed from that Syllabus need to adopt similarly Discourse-based methodologies if it is to successfully facilitate student meaning-making in a post-modern world. It could be argued that the English Syllabus (2001) represents an authentic response to challenges in education posed by post-modernism.

The English Syllabus document has clearly appropriated some of the language and insights of Discourse analysis. This is evident in its enumeration of student objectives (English Syllabus, 2001, pp.5-7), which reflect the rhetoric of Discourse analysis as defined by Slembrouck (2003). Study of Religion programs within schools would arguably benefit from a Multiliterate approach to learning facilitated by discourse based methodologies in order to enhance student meaning-making. Diverse meaning systems of religion could then be understood in terms of their relationship to the socio-cultural context in which they are produced, and critiqued accordingly within a Discourse analysis framework. The language of Discourse analysis may provide a starting point for the development of a metlanguage for teaching Study of Religion in a post-modern context.

Future directions
Phenomenological methodologies due to their origin within modernism have arguably been struggling to assist students to make meaning in a postmodern context. They may no longer be as effective as a pedagogical tool for Study of Religion as they were in the past. It is important to note, however, that by advocating a shift to methodologies that better reflect post-modern shifts in thinking is not tantamount to saying that post-modern methodologies are superior to modern methodologies.

Rather, by advocating a change in methodology is simply to acknowledge that the construction of meaning is now occurring within a different social and cultural context and that other methodological frameworks for meaning-making may be more effective. This is not to discount the value of enriching current phenomenological approaches in order to render them more meaningful tools for teaching and learning Study of Religion. Technology could provide some helpful options as to how this may be done. Unfortunately the focus and scope of this study does not allow for that conversation in depth. Therefore, a suggested change in methodology should not be confused with making a value judgement about the relative worth of methodologies, especially those having their provenance within a modern context.

In Study of Religion the task of the post-modern teacher/learning facilitator is arguably to render concepts that may be foreign to a student’s contextual narrative accessible by presenting these
concepts in a language that is intelligible to them. Therefore, it is feasible to postulate that on the changed educational landscape of post-modernism that Discourse-based methodologies may provide better opportunities than methodologies associated with modernism for such a language to be engendered. Furthermore, a Multiliterate approach to learning may allow for the successful communication of such a language by providing for the post-modern student, resources that are familiar to their contextual narrative. Consequently the task of de/constructing meaning within the Study of Religion learning environment could be enhanced.

References


Mark Craig is currently a secondary school teacher at Chisholm Catholic College, Cornubia and is employed by Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE). He teaches Study of Religion, Religious Education and Social Science. He has a Bachelor of Theology (BTh), a Graduate Certificate in Religious Education (GradCertRE), a Graduate Diploma in Education (GradDipEd) and a Masters in Education (Research) (MEd). The content of this article is largely derived from his Masters Thesis and has been completed in partial collaboration with Dr. Peta Goldburg of Australia Catholic University, Brisbane. Dr. Goldburg was one of Mark’s supervisors for his Masters Thesis, which was awarded in October 2006. mcraig@bne.catholic.edu.au
Feathers blown in the wind: good teaching, good news and religious education

Dr. Graham English, Australian Catholic University, Mount St Mary Campus

An anecdote is a short narrative of an incident of private life (Newnes 1952). This article is anecdotal. It relies on several short narratives. It is my informal account of how I have arrived at some conclusions about Religious Education over forty years as a religious educator. But it is not private. The anecdotes are about evangelization which is never private. The point of evangelization is to affect people with good news, having first been affected by it yourself: whether it is good news about football or about the meaning of life.

Evangelization in the Christian sense is about the good news of salvation. It is also about the hope there is in the universe, the cautiously optimistic view Catholics have of human life. Salvation is the assurance we have that the hope and cautious optimism are securely founded on texts, and in the life of the believing community.

I began teaching religion in 1964. My favourite text on religious education is The Renewal of the Education of Faith. It was published in 1970 just as I was becoming aware of what Vatican II meant for religious education and it gave me my favourite definition in religious education, ‘Evangelization strictly speaking is that first announcement of salvation to someone who, for various reasons, has no knowledge of it, or does not yet believe in it’. It goes on to say that the ministry of evangelization is essential in the Church, not only for non-Christian peoples but also for believers. As I have come back to the REF time and again since I realised that for me religious education is always about the assurance we have that our hope and cautious optimism are securely founded.

In 1978-79 I studied at the University of Lancaster and came to understand what Religious Studies is and became more convinced that when I am involved in religious education I am involved in reassurance of myself, even when I am empathizing with Buddhism, Judaism, or with any other religious position.

Ninian Smart based his approach to the study of religions on ‘empathy’. He talks of ‘epoche’, ‘a bracketing out of one’s feelings and assumptions about the phenomenon at hand’ (Smart 1998). But I do not keep my feelings bracketed out. I am forever asking of all phenomena, ‘Is this good news for me?’ Smart talks of a ‘warm neutralism’. I cannot be neutral. While the ‘warm’ is not a problem, I take sides. I am looking for good news. All my teaching is about me being affected by good news and then trying to pass it on.

Good news is that which enlightens my life, that which sets me free. If what I am doing is not good news I am not interested. I am claiming that despite the arguments about what Religious Education is or is not, all good teaching has to be good news. Life is too short to study phenomena that do not engage me.

Seeking to be engaged I found that ‘good news’ is more diverse than I originally thought or was taught, and so is salvation. Salvation according to my dictionary is ‘the act of saving: means of preservation from any serious evil; (theol) the saving of man (sic) from the power and penalty of sin, the conferring of eternal happiness’ (Newnes 1952). But I have learnt that the main message of salvation is that God loves me unconditionally and nothing I do will alter that.

For me as a Christian the Incarnation is the main sign of this. It is the most important thing I have ever heard. Other really important messages I have heard are that there is hope. And ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength, and with your entire mind; and your neighbour as yourself’ (Luke 10:27). Messages such as these save me.
But I hear good news not only in religion. Poetry, art, films, the love of others, good teaching, good books; all of these are places of good news. I have also learnt that before I can teach any of this as good news, I need to experience my desperate need for good news. This desperation reminds me that I cannot feel happy unless I acknowledge my sadness.

I claim this applies to all good teachers of anything: unless you are touched first, unless you experience the need to have good news, and have experienced good news you cannot teach in any meaningful way.

I teach undergraduate and graduate teachers preparing to teach Religious Education. Recently I watched a group of my students present a class on how they would teach a lesson on Moses and the Exodus. In my critique of the lesson I pointed out that the Christian interpretation of Exodus contains so much that is essential to understanding human experience; particularly it is about the metaphor of exile. Some of the class assured me they had not experienced exile so I had them think about alienation. I asked students to tell me of their feelings of alienation. One told us of feeling alienated in the Religious Education curriculum class. I asked her to tell us about this. She admitted that though she was studying Religious Education Curriculum she was not religious and she knew little about religion. When the knowledgeable in the class talked about religion she felt excluded. I was aware, then, that Exodus could help her more than students who claimed to feel no alienation at all. Exodus, the psalms and most of the Bible make the case that we are all exiles but we are not to give up hope.

St Augustine’s feeling expressed in, ‘Our hearts are restless and never will we rest until we rest in you’ comes straight out of Exodus, the Jews sitting weeping by the waters of Babylon and the young woman in my class who doesn’t know what is going on are all talking of the feeling of being an exile. Having acknowledged their alienation there is a chance, that when the good news is announced they will know their need to hear it. One question for me as a teacher is, where do I start to help my students hear the good news?

The Renewal of the Education of Faith was not the first book of good news that I read. When I was a child I read many stories: the William books, most of Biggles, war stories by authors such as Paul Brickhill, lots of ‘cowboy and indian’ yarls, the Don Camillo books; and myriad stories of saints. I came from a Catholic family where books and learning were valued but no one at home or at my school had any idea of what books were really worth reading so I didn’t read Winnie the Pooh and other children’s classics until I was an adult. I read what I could find. My favourite saints’ stories from early on were Miguel Pro, Vincent De Paul, Damian of Molokai, and the missionaries who went to China. Another was Saint Philip Neri though I think I was fifteen before I heard of him.

Neri was a Roman priest who lived from 1515 to 1595, who had a great gift for spiritual direction, and a well developed sense of the ridiculous. Once a lady came to him for confession and accused herself of being a gossip. ‘Go down to the market and buy a chook that has been killed but still has its feathers on,’ he told her, ‘and walk all around Rome plucking it until there are no feathers left. Then come back here’. She thought it was a silly thing to do but after all it was Father Philip and he was supposed to be wise. So she did it and came back. ‘What now Father?’ she asked. ‘Go back the way you have come and collect every feather,’ he said. ‘That is impossible Father Philip. It is a windy day. By now the feathers are everywhere.’ ‘Like your gossip,’ he chided her, ‘and you cannot get any of it back.’

When I was fifteen I changed schools and met Brother Athanasius McGlade. He taught me Leaving Certificate English. McGlade taught everything in an exciting way. It was all obviously important to him. He encouraged us to read widely and suggested books we might read and music we might listen to. Come Rack, Come Rope by Robert Hugh Benson was one book. It was a religious potboiler, an exciting and blood thirsty account of some of the English martyrs in Tudor England. But McGlade knew that pot boilers have their place because they can lead the interested student to go further. First you read Benson, then other books on the period, then catch on that if you follow the references and the footnotes to what your authors have been reading you quickly know a lot about the subject and you start reading the sources and the classics. Soon you are part of the tradition.

In teachers’ college I met another man who encouraged me to read widely though he was less into potboilers. Brother Columba Davy gave us a reading list; Voss, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, The Plough and the Stars, De Catechezandibus Rudibus, The Playboy of the Western World, Decline and Fall,
Travels with My Aunt and other books. I devoured them and I have read Decline and Fall regularly since when I need to laugh at teaching, teachers, or educational administrators generally.

When I was eleven, Brother Seery had taught us some poems. He began with Tennyson’s The Brook; ‘I come from haunt of coot and hern, I make a sudden sally,’ it begins. I did not know what this meant and nothing he said helped me imagine it. There had been a Sally when we were still in year two at the convent school but it seemed to have nothing to do with her. Brother said a brook was like a creek but Tennyson’s brook bore no resemblance to the Burrangong Creek at the bottom of our street. So I decided poetry was out of my reach.

Brother Davy though read us poetry from everywhere. He wanted us to be educated in the classics but started with classics I could cope with. Naming of Parts, Summer is icumen in, bits of Chaucer, Mallory, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Eliot; Tennyson too, but this time Ulysses. He didn’t take the poems apart or expect us to learn them off by heart, though I did learn things I wanted to know. He just taught me how to read poetry and helped me love poems.

When I was a young teacher various educational experts taught that comics were dangerous for children’s reading and that ball point pens would ruin children’s handwriting. My instinct was that they were wrong on both counts. I decided to follow both McGlade and Davy. If potboilers and comics led children to the classics as they did in my case then I would use whatever it took. A student brought Spike Milligan’s Book of Milliganimals to school and I liked it so I used it in poetry classes. I hadn’t heard of Milligan until then. As a child I had lived in a country town and hadn’t heard of the Goons. It was hard to pick up ABC radio for a start and even if it had been easy it was outside our cultural range. Just after discovering Milligan I found James Thurber’s The Wonderful O in a local bookshop. Soon I came upon Roger McGough, another Christian Brothers’ boy though this time from Liverpool in the UK who wrote poems for children that were at once really good and accessible, poems that extended children and invited them to go wider and deeper.

Lately people have been talking about the role of popular culture in education. It is also commonly said that we are in a post-modern age and that one of the signs of post-modernism is that there is no meta-narrative. A conclusion that is drawn from these claims by some educators is that there are no classics, that popular culture is as good and as worth studying as the classics. Some suggest we do not need to study the classics at all. Mickey Mouse is easier to read than Our Mutual Friend so we will study Mickey Mouse and Dickens can be neglected. Those who want to neglect Dickens have no friend in me.

I want my students to read as much Dickens as possible, and John Donne and Chaucer; indeed all the classics if they have the inclination and the ability. They have the right to be able to enjoy Hopkins, Keats, Newman, Austen, Proust and all the great writers. I have been where there are few good books and almost no good music and it is a desolate place. I am claiming, however that popular culture has a role to play in religious education because it is where the people are and, like the potboilers of my youth, it can lead people into the tradition. And some examples of present popular culture will be among the classics eventually. Cervantes’ Don Quixote was a potboiler when it was written. And so was the Book of Jonah.

In Moliere’s play The Bourgeois Gentleman Monsieur Jourdain discovers that he has ‘been speaking prose all my life, and didn’t even know it!’ Like Monsieur Jourdain I have been using popular culture in religious education all my teaching life and I didn’t even know it. When I began using popular culture in religious education it was just trusting my own instincts and taking Athanasius McGlade seriously. ‘If he is reading only Robert Hugh Benson it is better than not reading at all’. Benson made me interested in Thomas More. I found Utopia because I found Thomas More in a potboiler. That is part of what this article is about; the role of popular culture in religious education.

It is also an article about fools. The French priest-thinker Michel de Certeau describes the mystical as ‘a reaction against the appropriation of truth by the clerics.’ The mystical, he said ‘favours the illuminations of the illiterate, the experience of women, the wisdom of fools, the silence of the child’ (in Harris 1999). By ‘cleric’ de Certeau does not mean priests or bishops as such. He means those individuals or groups who presume they have the truth and who try to impose it on everyone else.

He is claiming that every time that happens, in the Church or in the wider society God talks through
an illiterate no one like Bernadette Soubirous, a fool like John Vianney, a whole group of those considered unimportant (women for example), or the silence of children, those pained uncomprehending faces we see almost nightly on television from Iraq, or the refugee detention centres in Australia.

Fools, illiterates and children have a close association with popular culture. Fools often are sources of good news. On a hill called Guadeloupe just outside Mexico City on December 9, 1531, so the story goes the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego, a Mexican Indian peasant. She asked that a shrine be built there. This request was duly carried out and today it is a place of pilgrimage for hundreds of thousands of people. Some of my students visited it on their way to World Youth Day in Canada in 2002 and were overawed. There is some doubt that Juan Diego ever existed but as he was canonised by Pope John Paul II we can presume there is something in this story even if it is not all historically verifiable. I read somewhere without noting the source that Our Lady of Guadeloupe really appealed to the Mexicans because she spoke to Juan Diego in the local Indian language, not in Spanish the language of the conquering upper class. She was their Virgin Mary, not the Virgin Mary of those with the property and power.

This has an echo in another apparition of the Virgin. Bernadette Soubirous was also a peasant who said that she had seen the Virgin Mary, this time at Lourdes an out of the way town at the foot of the Pyrenees. Again Mary spoke to the girl not in the classical French of the Paris salons, or even of the flash convents, but in the patois of the illiterate working class shepherdess.

When Bernadette later entered the convent at Nevers at the age of twenty two she found that some of the sisters were jealous of her. These sisters could not understand how Mary would appear to someone who couldn’t read or write, or even speak good French when there were all of them there in the convent that could. ‘Surely, when the Virgin Mary speaks French she will speak it particularly well to someone who can understand her!’ they might have thought, not unreasonably. But she didn’t. She spoke patois because Bernadette did and Mary wanted to be understood by her.

Mary met Bernadette where she worked, and talked to her in a language she understood.

Quite a few people over the centuries have claimed to have had visions of the Virgin Mary. Not all of them later became saints even when the Church had accepted that their visions were genuine. Bernadette Soubirous is a saint now, not because of the visions but because of what she did with the rest of her life. This involved putting up with and growing holy among some of the less than saintly sisters she had chosen to live with. Bernadette had learnt somehow a truth summed up a few years after her death by the Scottish Sacred Heart sister Janet Erskine Stewart who lived from 1857 to 1914. She wrote:

As far as we are concerned, God means things to be just as they are, what does happen and what does not happen. So never wish them otherwise by a hair’s breadth. All the raw material for sanctity is in the ‘now’ just as it is, and if it had not the two elements, the one we do not understand, and the one that we would not choose, it would not be what it is.

I cannot find the source of this quote either. Stewart’s life and letters were published in a book by Maud Monahan in 1921 and the quote is not there but I am sure it is hers. The point of it is that all the raw material for sanctity is in the ‘now’ just as it is.

Another quote that complements this is from The Cloud of Unknowing:

In the realm of the spirit heaven is as near up as it is down, behind as before, to left or to right. The access to heaven is through desire. Those who long to be there really are there in spirit. The path to heaven is measured by desire not by miles. For this reason St Paul says in one of his epistles, “Although our bodies are presently on earth, our life is in heaven”. Other saints have said substantially the same thing but in different ways. They mean that love and desire constitute the life of the spirit. And the spirit abides where its love abides as surely as it abides in the body which it fills with life. Does this make any more sense to you? We need not strain our spirit in all directions to reach heaven, for we dwell there already through love and desire.

The Cloud of Unknowing is a short book written in medieval Britain by an author whose name has long been lost. She or he is claiming that we are in heaven already. If that is right and God is in heaven then God is all about us, now, just as it is.
I have been strongly influenced by the quotes from Janet Erskine Stewart and the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing, as well as Athanasius McGlade and Columba Davy my two old teachers. If the material for sanctity is in the now and we are in heaven already then God can be found in the ordinariness of the now. In fact God, like the Virgin Mary in Guadeloupe and Lourdes speaks to people in patois. And some of the local patois where I live is the popular culture my students live in.

Part of my work is to teach religious education curriculum to undergraduate and graduate students preparing to teach religion in secondary schools, mostly in Catholic schools though not entirely. For some years in their final religious education curriculum course I set prospective secondary school teachers this assignment:

This task involves you identifying an experience that has been important in your own spiritual/religious/personal development and reflecting on it. Use as your focus an experience, a book, poem, work of art, movie, article (or series of articles) which has engendered or supported your personal development. The book, movie, articles, whatever need to have either helped you better understand your experience of life or have opened up a new insight or state of appreciation that has made you see life in a different or changing light.

You are to write a review of your chosen book, movie, articles or whatever commenting on the following aspects:

a) Why is this text significant for you?
b) How has this work changed your perception of or enriched your life?
c) What affect will this have on you as a teacher and how you teach?
d) How could you use this text or your experience of it effectively in the classroom?

The second part of this assessment task was to have them present this to their tutorial class:

The presentations will be done individually and will be no more than 20 minutes in duration. You can use any methods of presentation you choose, for example dance, song, power point, video clip, or interview.

Some of these students talked of specifically religious experiences; going to World Youth Day in Canada or Rome or Germany for instance. One talked of the death of her father and of how the local priest had brought around a statue of the Virgin Mary and said the rosary with the family. It was a traveling statue that he took from home to home as he saw the need. As part of her presentation she had us make a decade of the rosary from beads and fishing line she had brought along and taught the class how to say the decade as we made the little prayer aid.

Another told us of a hike she and her boyfriend had made in the Andes and of how as they helped each other survive the strenuous adventure they gradually built up the kind of trust that has been the basis of their marriage. One student talked of her near death experience when she had fallen victim to a stroke while still at school. At the hospital a doctor taught her to make paper cranes and introduced her to the story of the Japanese girl who tried to make a thousand paper cranes before she died of leukemia after being exposed to the atom bomb at Hiroshima. This doctor taught my student how to find hope while he had her practise her fine motor skills making the cranes and thus helped her regain her health.

Some students used films, others songs. One young woman from Eritrea did a peace dance and told us of her hopes for peace. Several have sung songs from popular culture; one sang a series of songs she had written. Films, videos, and clowning for sick children at Westmead Children’s Hospital have also been experiences reflected on. Some who work in the St Vincent De Paul night van or with street kids at Macquarie Fields talked of that and linked their experience with religious education curriculum in ways that suggested they were learning more than one thing at a time.

I too have used film teaching religious education or when trying to understand my own life. Teaching morality for example I have used a clip from that fine 2000 Kenneth Lonergan film with Laura Linney and Mark Ruffalo You Can Count on Me. Time and again I have heard an unhelpful or dispiriting homily at Mass on Sunday morning then on the Sunday afternoon seen a film that enriches my spiritual life. The German film The Lives of Others is a recent example. The Hilary Swank movie Freedom Writers is another. As it is in Heaven is a third.
I do not use film just to get my students interested. I introduce them to culture for its own sake because the best of it gives me hope. I start with films, poetry, books and music that help me in my religious life, and then encourage the students to find and be open to what will enrich them.

In 1958 and 1959 the NSW English Syllabus set *The Merchant of Venice* to be studied in year eight and *Henry V* for year nine. *The Merchant of Venice* and *Henry V* were in their day both popular and high culture all at once. It depended whether you were standing in the pit or seated on the balcony and probably on whether you were eating oranges or drinking sack as you watched the play. Brother George Barfield our teacher was conscientious about us passing the final exams so he had us learn great slabs of the texts by heart. I can still recite bits of those two plays and they are slightly more important to me than the rest of Shakespeare because I came to them first and they led me into the others.

James McAuley’s poem, *One thing at least* says, ‘Loving must be learnt by heart/ if it’s to be any good.’ I use the whole poem often in religious education curriculum lectures. ‘Learnt by heart’ here means two things. It means what Brother Barfield did with the two Shakespeare plays; he made us recite them out loud until bits stuck in our heads. It also means that loving is a heart thing; it has to do with passion. Loving poetry is just the same as loving a person in this respect. So is, loving God. I can get better by practising; at the same time it is a mystery, an experience beyond rational explanation.

Popular culture is for some of our students their only culture and so it has to be where they find God. God speaks to them where God speaks to any of us, in our context.

There was a poster in the 1970s that read, ‘You may be the only book on Jesus Christ that some people ever read.’ It is a cliché, but clichés persist because they contain some of the truth. My task as a Catholic teacher is, among other things, to help my students hear God in their ‘now’, to find Jesus Christ in their reading, and all their experience. And with my student teachers it is to help them help their students to do the same.

Religious education teaching is primarily enabling others to be who God calls them to be, and to meet God in their lives, because it is the only place God is for us.

**References**


This paper outlines the content and processes of a workshop and presentation on Church given to a group of young Catholic adults as part of a weekend that focussed on leadership and faith formation. The session offers a model that could be adapted for use voluntary contexts for education/formation in ministry and professional development for youth leaders and catechists. A major event like World Youth Day and the publication of the research report from the Pastoral Projects Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Catholics Who Have Stopped Going to Mass highlights the importance of opportunities for reflections and conversations about Church.

Thirty young adult gathered in a semi rural location on the outskirts of Sydney for a weekend designed to facilitate faith formation and leadership development. These people were volunteers, young adult Catholics interested in strengthening their ties with the Church. This topic was one of a number covered over the weekend including “Images of God” and “Prayer and Mission”. The topic on “Church” was presented in two sessions separated by morning tea. The aim of the session was to create a learning environment in which participants understanding of Church was broadened, challenged and enriched by new insights.

The first session began with a reflection and group discussion using photo-language. This activity was chosen because according to its creators, working with the photo-language method facilitates the possibility of individuals in a group context, communicating at depth (Cooney, 1986). Before the participants entered, the room was set-up with 80 photo-language images laid out on a carpeted floor with enough space between photographs for people to move around. The larger gathering was divided into two groups of 15 participants. Each group in turn was then given 5 minutes to examine the pictures. Participants were invited to choose a photograph that reflected, embodied or expressed their current understanding of Church. They were instructed to just choose the image, not pick it up. Background music was played to create a reflective atmosphere. At the end of the 10 minutes of inspecting the pictures, all participants were invited to pick up the image they had chosen. If two people chose the same image this was noted and it was taken after negotiation. Participants were then instructed to form into 6 groups each with five members to share, in turn, their responses to the following questions:

1. Describe what you see in the picture
2. What does the image say to you about Church?
3. Why did you choose it?

Twenty to twenty five minutes were allocated for this task.

This exercise was followed by an invitation for some feedback from the groups capturing highlights and insights that arose through the small group sharing.

The images chosen by the young people fell into four main categories:

- Images of relationships depicting two people or two adults and child
- Images of community depicting groups of people engaged in some form of activity
- Images of mystery depicting cosmic or natural scenes in which no people are present
- Images of people in the natural environment depicting people dwarfed by the sea or forest.

It is interesting to note that while there where some specific images of church buildings and stained glass windows that were available for choice none of these photographs were selected by any of the participants as their image of Church.

Beginning with a process such as this acknowledged the lived experience of the
participants. This dynamic involved the selection of an image of Church and the articulation of their reason for their choice in a small group context. Listening to the ideas of others promoted associations and new insights.

Selecting an image reflected an initially unmediated response. Reasons for their image selection become clearer through the process of reflection and sharing. The large group process provided an opportunity for clarification and validation. Perhaps not unsurprisingly a split between the institutional Church seen as buildings, rules and regulation and a Church of the “heart” was identified by these young people. The process itself while educative and potentially transformative also served in breaking down potential barriers to learning.

After morning tea, session two involved a power point presentation titled Why Church? Two central questions: why do we need a church and did Jesus found the church were the focus for the opening discussion. The first slide showed a sketch of a middle-aged man dressed in a suit, throwing a model of a church building into a garbage bin. The issue of the perception of the church as being simply a hierarchical institution that people belong to for certain spiritual benefits (Tacey, 2003) was explored. The parameters of this session were established with further questions raised. Why should I stay in the church and be involved in its life and activities? Or if I don’t attend church, what am I missing out on? Why does the church exist at all?

The relationship of Jesus to the Church is an important issue for all Christians. Discussion moved to the issue of whether Jesus intended to found a church at all. The following points are drawn from the chapter on Church in Fischer & Hart’s Christian Foundations. They provided the scaffold for the ongoing visual presentation and large group discussion.

Biblical scholarship of the last few decades has alerted us to the fact that asking if Jesus intended to found a church may not be the right question. Our biblical sources are not primarily interested in exploring Jesus’ intentions, and do not enable us to answer that question with any certitude…Jesus did not institute the church by formally establishing particular organisational structures, but by his death and resurrection and the sharing of his spirit of new life (Fischer& Hart, 1995, p151).

A fruitful approach to the issue of Jesus’ institution of the church, offered by Fischer& Hart (1995), sees the church as God’s creation through the action of the Spirit. While open to the possibility of finding a basis for certain church structures in Jesus’ actions, they remind us that the earliest Christians did not see themselves starting a new religious movement, or as a separate religious group. The source of their unity was a shared faith experience, belief in the saving action of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Church structure, including leadership structures, worship, law and sacraments developed gradually as a response to the attempts to live in the life giving Spirit of the crucified Christ.

Another way of understanding this relation between Jesus and the church is emphasising the Church’s role in continuing the vision and mission of Jesus. The early Christians had a strong conviction that Jesus was the reason for a new understanding of their religious tradition. Mark’s gospel has Jesus forming a new family of disciples. The author of Luke-Acts describes a gradually emerging Church as others follow in the way of Jesus and share their wealth with one another. A slide with the symbols of the four evangelists formed the background for these points.

The early Christian communities believed their foundation was in Christ. The Pauline writings draw out this relationship by describing the individual community as the body of Christ. A slide showing early Christians gathered around a table was used here.

The founding of the Church, therefore, did not take place in one single institutional act but gradually, as Jesus’ followers began through the Spirit to discover their own way and the implications of their calling. The relationship of the Church to Jesus lies in its continuity with his vision and actions” (Fischer& Hart, 1995, p152).

They point out that there is a general consensus amongst contemporary scholars that concurs, “Jesus did not directly begin a new religious organisation, but he did lay the groundwork for one in many ways” (Fischer& Hart 1995, p153). A slide of a dove and flames of fire, symbols of the Holy Spirit focussed the importance of the Spirit in
the birth of the church.

A slide with Greek letters Chi-rho was shown next. Participants were asked if they recognised the symbol and to explain its meaning. The symbol was identified and its significance in the conversion of Constantine was noted. This slide stimulated discussion about the relationship between Church and government. The issue of industrial relations and Catholic social teaching was raised, with the insight that there is sometimes tension between the Church’s institutional and prophetic roles.

Why does the Church exist? This question was explored with the help of a slide of a small group of young Christians celebrating Eucharist in Iraq. Embedded in this question is the issue of identifying what is required to live a life of faith. Catholics see faith as lived, not in isolation, but in the context of a particular historical community. “Conversion to Christ and persistence in the way of life it demands calls for an environment which makes the Christian life possible” (Fischer& Hart 1995, 153). Discussion was around the notion of the Church as both local, particular communities of mutual support and the Church universal. That sense of connectedness and belonging is what enables mutual support in any community.

Nelson Mandela, in his years of imprisonment, was sustained by his unbroken links to his people and it enabled his survival and, indeed, even the forgiveness of his captors. The publisher’s note to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s “Letters and papers from prison”, provide the biographical context of his writings as a gifted theologian and pastor in the Confessing church. He was arrested in 1944 for his involvement with a German organisation that was connected with attempts to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer was hanged in a Nazi prison camp in April 1945. Even today when we commemorate his life, we recall his suffering and are moved by his writings. The poem “Who Am I?” written during his imprisonment was handed out and read aloud by selected participants. It is a powerful example of the strength provided by that sense of belonging even when the community is far removed. It is a connectedness that transcends space and time. Bonhoeffer’s writings illustrate that Church is a trans-historical, trans-geographical community, expressed in the doctrine of the communion of saints. Comments from participants following conversation about the poem indicated a positive response and genuine engagement in the process.

A visual representation of the breaking of bread on the road to Emmaus (Luke 22) provided the next backdrop slide as the importance of the scriptures and sacraments to the life of the church was identified. Participants were invited to reflect upon the gifts of the Scriptures as the community book, and the sacraments as the ritual actions of the church community. For Catholics, scripture and sacraments provide the language, the stories and rituals that help shape the way we see the world. “We are from early life by our communities starting with our family, and our ways of seeing the world, are profoundly shaped by the stories and images of our social groups” (Fischer& Hart, 1995, p 153).

Gula (1985) identifies the role of community in the development of morality. Our many worlds are like concentric circles, and these communities provide us with stories and images to shape what we see and value. Believing vision and moral choice are key notions of the moral life, Gula (1985) writes that the more we participate in the stories, rituals, images and language of the community which has its greatest influence on us, the more we begin to take on its way of seeing. He sees the Church as the community responsible for communicating the stories of Christian faith so that they may shape the imagination, nurture vision and help evaluate values acquired from other communities. If, as Gula (1985) suggests, our vision results from internalising the beliefs and values of our particular communities, the challenge to religious educators is to nourish the imagination with the Christian stories and images, facilitating a choice to respond to life issues with gospel vision.

The next focus continued the discussion under the heading Why Church? With a slide from a session of Vatican II, the idea that beliefs can be tested in a community was raised. Community is a place where doubts can be shared and addressed. An aerial photograph over St Peters was used to accompany the exploration of the value of a community heritage. Individual beliefs are able to be weighed against the memory and tradition of a community. Community preserves the world of beliefs in its totality as believers illumine the total Christian mystery for one another.

We need the support of a community to continue believing. Role models; counselling and spiritual direction; material help in time of need; and a locus for social life and celebration are listed by Fischer& Hart (1995, p 154) as some of the ways
the Church communities support a life of faith. A slide containing the logos of a few Church agencies such as Centacare, St Vincent de Paul society and Caritas was shown.

**Role Models**

In every age Christian saints strive to interpret and live the gospel of Jesus and hence provide the continuing role models for each generation that hears their story. In our own time the example of Maximillam Kolbe, Oscar Romero and the lay missionary Jeannie Donovan, murdered in El Salvador immediately come to mind. Groome (1998) points out that saints have come from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds with different social and political perspectives, living out their lives in a variety of vocations:

For every Francis of Assisi who relinquished the things of the world and eschewed the halls of power, there is an Ignatius of Loyola who saw everything with potential for the glory of God and set out to educate the future leaders of society.

For every Teresa of Avila or Julian of Norwich who gave themselves to the contemplative life, there is a Catherine of Sienna and Joan of Arc who got embroiled in the ecclesial and social politics of their day.

For every Mother Theresa who consoled the poor and dying, there is a Dorothy Day, who committed to reform the social structures that are the root cause of poverty. (Groome, 1998, p 328).

Accordingly, in a pair /share activity, participants were asked to think of a saint that was especially important to them.

**Church life and activity**

At the University where I work, we talk about graduate attributes and list the outcomes and competencies that are expected of a graduating student.

If the church is a ‘school for saints’ then all the activities of the church’s life are the curriculum (Harris, 1989). Harris says that experiences in community and liturgy are curriculum, in different ways from the content and processes associated with a schooling paradigm. She points out that in the past the catechism was seen as the basis for faith education yet all the while “Catholics were being educated communally and liturgically by a broad sacramental life” (Harris, 1989, p58). Church communities also support a life of faith by providing a locus for social life and celebration.

Engebretson provides a story of a family attending Sunday Mass.

In the seat in front of us was a young woman with four very small children. The eldest of these would have been perhaps six, and the youngest a smiling, beautiful baby girl, warmly wrapped up against the cold, was perhaps six months old. The woman looked tired. I wondered why she was there by herself with the children, and assumed that her partner must be one of those many who work on Sundays, leaving her no choice but to bring the children with her to Mass. I had had to work to get our family there, reasonably awake and receptive, but my achievements were nothing in comparison with hers. All those tiny socks and shoes, all those coats, all those little faces to be washed, and hair to be brushed, breakfast to be made and eaten before mass so that the children didn’t cry from hunger before it was half-way over. I knew from experience just what it had cost her to get to church that Sunday morning with her four children (Engebretson, 1994, p14).

This account was read to the group and in a pair/share activity they were asked to think about and briefly discuss the reasons why people make the effort to bring their young families to Church.

Participants were then asked to brainstorm and list all the activities of a typical parish. Some parish bulletins were provided to assist in this process. Some phone books were also provided, participants were able to turn to Catholic and identify the various Diocesan agencies.

**Models of Church**

As an introduction to models of Church, participants were invited to silently read and reflect upon a series of similes “Church is like…” taken from the list provided in Ch3 of the text *Making our way through Primary R.E.* The activity involved asking participants in small groups to first complete each sentence then select the one simile that most resonated with their preferred understanding of Church.
Participants were invited to add some further possible images of Church. The comparison of Church to a family prompted my sharing that when our youngest son was baptised, his godmother gave him a card with the words ‘Welcome to the big family’. John Paul II also favoured the family model

There exist in the world countless people who unfortunately cannot in any sense claim membership of what could be called in the proper sense a family... For those who have no natural family the doors of the great family which is the Church must be opened even wider. No one is without in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who “labour and are heavily laden” (Familiaris Consortio, 1882, # 85)

Baptism initiates the person into a community with a vision centred on Christ, with its more inclusive sense of family, beyond clan, tribal and national boundaries.

An overview of Avery Dulles classic Models of Church was then introduced. Dulles believes that the mystery of the Church is too rich and diverse to be confined to a single image or model. He warns that each one taken alone can distort the reality of Church. Rather his work presents a critical assessment of the Church in many aspects. Dulles work can be misunderstood as different ways of being Church. It seems that his intention was to shine a light through a lens so a particular aspect of the one reality that is Church is highlighted. It is as if you see red things using a red light, and if you shine a yellow light, you see yellow things, yet the object itself is unchanged.

Before the six slides with an image and descriptor of each of Dulles’ models were viewed, participants were asked to attend carefully to the following descriptions and then to make a choice as to which model they identified with currently. Spaced around the walls of the room were large printed copies of the slides of the various models: the Church as institution; Church as Sacrament; Church as Herald; Church as servant; church as mystical communion; Church as community of disciples. A brief overview of Dulles models was presented then participants were invited to move from their place and physically stand under the picture of the model of church they most relate to. The activity finished with people sharing in their chosen model group some reasons for their choice. Some feedback was taken as various participants from each model group articulated their choice in the large forum. This was a successful activity near the end of the session. The prior announcement that people were to make a choice acted to heighten their awareness and strengthen their motivation for active listening at the conclusion of a long session. After Dulles models were presented, moving around the room participants looked at the posters, evaluated the options and made a judgement. Articulating the reasons for their choice allowed for a consolidation of their judgement and an openness to the perspectives of others.

The final slide examined the Communion of Saints and opened up the role of Mary in the life of the Church. Elizabeth Johnston brings these two themes together as follows

The communion of saints is a doctrinal symbol that stands for the fact that all who are baptized are related to each other through being related to Christ. The bond with Christ is so strong that even death cannot break it; death does not cause one to leave the church. Thus the community extends not only in space all over the world, but also in time throughout all the ages. Those who have gone before us, however broken and sinful they may have been, have contributed by their ultimate faith and example to our own journey...In this context of mutuality centred on Christ, it is legitimate to ask a companion to ‘pray for us’, as indeed Reformation Christians do among the living. By such a request we dive into the community of saints, take refuge in it, strengthen the bonds among each other and thereby with Christ. As a preeminent member of the community, Mary, too, may be called upon in prayer. According to Catholic teaching there is no obligation to call upon Mary and the other saints, although it is encouraged as good and useful. If we do so, however, it does not necessarily overshadow the role of Christ; rather it can be an expression of our belonging to the communion of saints. (Johnson, 1993, 7-8).

It is interesting to note that Benedict XVI concludes his first Encyclical as Pope Deus Caritas Est makes the same connection between the Church and her mission in the service of love, the communion of saints and the role of Mary in the life of the Church (see Deus Caritas Est # 42).

This session was evaluated as part of the formal
evaluation of the total formation/training process of the weekend. The organisers reported that the session was well received. Comments made by participants included, “This session provided new insights into the importance of community and institution” and “it enriched my understanding of Church”, “I never knew the Church did so much”.

The effectiveness of the session was evidenced by the invitation to present this workshop again on two subsequent occasions. It is worth noting that the section on models of Church was initially presented in a more didactic mode. Critical reflection on the process led to a change in pedagogy such that the participants were invited to physically move as an indication of their preferred model of Church. The process as described above reflected a change made in the second presentation.

This paper has outlined the content and processes of a workshop presented in the context of a formation process for young Catholic adults. The strategy involved leading participants through a series of teaching learning processes. These were designed to generate insights which facilitated recognition of the limitations of any one understanding of Church. In doing so the workshop enabled participants to envisage a more expansive vision of Church, a bigger picture. Essentially this pedagogical method requires a non-confrontational, invitational approach that values conversation and dialogue as an integral part of the process. The educational techniques employed and the content presented reflect both the level of faith commitment of participants and their level of knowledge of the topic area. Adapted to suit particular audiences the structure, content and processes presented in this paper could be useful in other settings including retreat type situations, youth group formation programs as well as in adult faith education or professional development for Religious Education teachers and catechists.

References


Deconstructing Dawkins’ views about God

In the previous two issues of this journal several responses have been given to Richard Dawkins’ atheistic assault on (religious) communities, the most recent of which was his work *The God Delusion* (Great Britain, Bantam Press). In this issue we present the third and final in a series of book reviews by John W Fisher, University of Ballarat, of authors who refute Dawkins’ propositions.


Wilson’s monograph of 112 pages is both easy reading and logical, and provides answers to Dawkins’ musings. It is hard to dignify Dawkins’ claims and contentions with the term ‘arguments’ as they do not contain enough evidence to be worthy of this term.

Before *The God Delusion*, Dawkins was considered to be ‘the world’s most high-profile atheist.’ Wilson believes that Dawkins’ book will make ‘many agnostics recoil in distaste, making theism more potentially attractive.’ Wilson quoted a review of Dawkins’ book by Thomas Nagel, Professor of Philosophy at New York University (in New Republic 23 October 2006) ‘A very uneven collection of scriptural ridicule, amateur philosophy and contemporary horror stories, anthropological speculation, and cosmological scientific arguments…Dawkins is operating mostly outside the range of his scientific expertise.’

Wilson is slightly intrigued by Dawkins’ book. ‘It combines unusually wide-ranging content with an elegant and amusing style, which makes the writing compelling entertainment, whatever one thinks of the argument.’

After a tongue-in-cheek ‘analysis’ of *The God Delusion* (Wilson, 2007, pp. 24-30), Wilson found ‘how little of the book is actually formed of arguments against God’s existence.’ Wilson stripped Dawkins’ views bare, ending up with four points to consider:

1. the strident anti-supernaturalism that pervades the book is never substantiated, and is open to the charge of cooking the evidence in advance.
2. the brief logical argument [about God’s omnipotence concurrent with omniscience] is both facile and inadequate.
3. the attack on Scripture is littered with mistakes and misrepresentations, which severely undermine the case being made [by Dawkins].
4. the premises of, and appeals to, un-provable theories render the arguments in the scientific section weak. [which is where you would expect Dawkins to be strongest].

Wilson focuses on Dawkins’ failure to address the resurrection of Jesus, which is central to Christian belief and practice, in his arguments about the existence of God. He also likens Dawkins’ feeble attempts at discrediting Scripture to ‘chasing the mice out of a sitting room, and thus announce the house is free of animals, while there is an elephant grinning on the sofa.’ Dawkins’ views look very much like fairy floss, in which a small amount of sugar is whipped in a frenzy to give an illusion of substance, but once ingested, it deflates leaving nothing substantial to chew on. But, is he objecting too much to religion or the presence of God? In an interview with Francis Collins the Director of the Human Genome Project, Dawkins said, ‘I provided what I thought were cogent arguments against a supernatural intelligent designer. But it does seem to me to be a worthy idea. Refutable—but nevertheless grand and big enough to be worthy of respect…If there is a God, it’s going to be a whole lot bigger…than anything that any theologian of any religion has ever proposed.’ (*Time* 5 November 2006)

The Apostle Paul thought he had the Christians and their God sized up but he found that’ God is more than enough to satisfy the sceptic’s soul.’ (see Romans 11:33-6).

Dawkins is very much like the minister who wrote in large letters in the margin of his sermon, ‘Argument weak, shout loudly.’ Maybe, he protests too much.

A point to ponder, ‘God has not finished with any of us yet, whether or not we have finished or never started with Him.’

Dr John W. Fisher
School of Education
University of Ballarat


With a title like this, one would think the book defended Intelligent Design (ID). It doesn’t. It really is a debate. And ID loses. Sort of.
Following a brief history of the ID movement by editor Robert B. Stewart, a very cordial debate begins. William A. Dembski, MDiv, PhD in mathematics and philosophy, and icon of the ID movement, asserts that science cannot test the validity of a primary purpose. Ultimate meaning, he points out, cannot survive — look as if they’re designed. And the “other side”, he adds, cannot come up with an explanation.

Highly published philosopher of science, Michale Ruse, responds. He admits that naturalism is as much a metaphysical commitment as theism, but refutes ID on three grounds: First, scientific: nature can build complex systems by means of “scaffolding” then take the scaffolding away. Second, theological: one or two misplaced molecules can lead to terrible genetic diseases; why did the designer not do the job better? And thirdly, moral: to Christians, materialists seem all too casual about issues like abortion and gay marriage. The ID movement seems more of a cultural than scientific reaction.

The remainder of the book is composed of articles about the validity of ID. In his contribution, Martinez Hewlett, emeritus professor of molecular and cellular biology, picks up on the moral question. Soon after Darwin’s publication of Origin of the Species, he points out, Thomas Huxley opined that Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist and Herbert Spencer, who actually coined the phrase “survival of the fittest”, reasoned that natural selection could be applied to societies and economics as well. Francis Galton took one step further: why not influence the course of evolution with what he called “eugenics”? Some evolutionists, later contributors add, would conjecture that human ethics is simply a biological adaptation in the aid for survival; any deeper meaning is illusory.

Hewlett, nevertheless, ultimately concludes that ID is not science, but a well-meaning, ill-conceived attempt to counter an extra-scientific ideology that has plagued evolution since Darwin’s first publication. Like the vast majority of scientists, claims Hewlett, he himself is a believer in theistic evolution.

Many of the contributors to the debate try to hash out what a believer in both God and evolution means. Some say that science cannot test the validity of a primary cause, an unmoved mover; that is the role of philosophy. Let the parameters of the disciplines be set.

Others disagree. The Anthropic Cosmological Principle – which roughly states that had the universe not been so minutely fine-tuned 13.7 billion years ago we humans would not be here to ask why are we here – inevitably raises the question of a designer.

Sir John Polkinghorne, Anglican priest and former Cambridge professor of physics, comes across as perhaps the most honest and viable contributor with regard to divine action.

First, he says, as Christians we see the mind of God behind the universe’s marvelous order; the will of God behind history. The fact that we can understand the universe – a fact science cannot explain – makes sense if we are created in the image of God. Second, the divine kenosis – self-emptying, self-limitation – is a sign of a loving God who permits creation to not only be itself, but make itself, the corollary to which is that contingent exploration can lead not only to new fruitfulness but also ragged edges and blind alleys – earthquakes, for example, and murders. Finally, Polkinghorne finds no adequate scientific grounds to exclude the metaphysics of agency, that is, God, including the possibility of divine interaction in history. Faith, he continues, may discern providence operating “within the divinely ordained open grain of nature” (p. 174) however providence cannot be demonstrated via experiment nor less so be attributed to quantum physics or chaotic unpredictability. Miracles like the resurrection of Jesus are direct, unprecedented, self-revelatory acts of God.

Polkinghorne ultimately refutes ID and upholds theistic evolution. Creation is not the performance of a fixed score, but an improvisation in which both creator and creature participate, he ventures, adding: “it was not decreed from all eternity that homo sapiens should appear in our contingent five-fingered specificity, but the emergence of self-conscious beings able to know and worship their Creator was ordained by the divine will” (pp. 177-78).

Wolfgang Pannenberg, systematic theologian at the University of Heidelberg, rounds out the book on an eschatological note. If the Logos, the Word, is the origin of creation, then the spirit of God is the vital energy, the source of all movement (Ps 104:30). The end-times began with the resurrection of Jesus; now all creation awaits the final Sabbath, the future completion, the goal of the universe.

Intelligent Design may lose out in this book, but the dialogue between science, theology and philosophy does not. Underlying perhaps the ill-advised scientific endeavors of ID is a genuine yearning for the unity of reason and hope, a search for individual and universal purpose. Ultimately everyone must make a metaphysical choice: materialism or theism. This book makes it clear that theistic evolution, as opposed to ID, not only does not contradict science, but is perhaps the most intellectually and spiritually coherent position.

Daniel J. Stollenwerk, STD
DRS at St. Peter’s College Middle School, Auckland, New Zealand.
This book discusses the spiritual dimension of the lives of children. The authors identify their aim as exploring some key issues and providing insight into the expression of spirituality in children. The introduction gives a concise overview of the landscape of contemporary spirituality. It identifies the debate between those who support an intrinsic connection between spirituality and religion and those who would see spirituality as independent of any religious expression. While both sides acknowledge that religion and spirituality are distinct entities there is disagreement as to the place/importance of religious traditions.

The book is divided into three sections, children’s voices, children’s worlds and children’s lives. The opening chapter explores the paradox that while children in western societies have so much freedom of expression the authors believe children’s voices have been ‘silenced’ when talking about spirituality. While children’s views are being increasingly recognized in areas such as health, education, family separation and child protection they are being ignored in matters relating to the spiritual. Some examples of incidents which are interpreted as children’s spiritual experiences are recounted. Citing the research of Hay and Nye authors as an expression of children’s spirituality. The darker side of spiritual experience is also addressed. Suggesting that potentially frightening or disturbing spiritual experiences should not be ignored, the authors are aware that some children will need additional support. In the recommendations, they advise:

- Be aware that at times the boundaries between the religious and the spiritual may be blurred. For some people, the label given to the experience is important, for others it is not; as the observer or listener, simply be aware of the sensitivities of the issues of definition raised (Adams et. al., 2008, p. 71).

The chapter titled “Connecting to something greater: Spirituality and respect for personhood” suggests that adults can affirm children’s appreciation of emotion, sensitivity, care and even sensuality as an important element in the nurturing of spirituality. It offers a compelling discussion that explores the issue of HIV/AIDS and a sense of personhood. The next chapter examines the notion of spiritual intelligence as a capacity to draw on the spiritual as a means to address and solve problems of meaning in life.

The book’s third section explores some elements from the lives of children which can influence their spirituality, including worldviews. The significance of context and how it shapes the spiritual dimension for children is discussed using the example of ‘Australian spirituality’. The final chapter examines the impact of ‘spiritual dreams’ upon children’s lives. While dreams

(2006), the authors suggest that wider cultural norms are behind this dismissal of all things spiritual.

There is often a fear that if one divulges spiritual encounters, others will misunderstand, ridicule or dismiss them. In short, there is a cultural taboo in the West surrounding the spiritual- one which labels people who broach the subject as ‘weird’ (Adams et. al., 2008, p. 34).

The second chapter links identity and spirituality with the development of a sense of self and the search for one’s voice. In educational settings space for thinking, reflecting and imagining are recommended as opposed to a classroom where children are continually required to be ‘on task’. Headings like ‘Freedom to grow’ and ‘Scaffolding the awareness of self’ detail this perspective. The challenge for teachers is to create the space for the unexpected question that is behind new learning. An interesting example from contemporary South Africa analyses how stereotypes and expectations associated with gender can impact on identity.

The second section, “Children’s worlds”, describes some of experiences from the lives of children that some may term spiritual. Accounts of ‘moments of awe and wonder’ are presented as are various recounts of some children’s seeing a person who has died. These encounters as well as asking probing questions about the meaning of life are seen by the are referred to in the scriptures of many world religions, this chapter considers the implications of Western societies’ ambivalent attitudes towards significant dreams for both children and adults and offers some points for reflection.

There are issues raised and positions outlined in this book that some may find problematic. Yet the book offers an invitation to the reader to identify and clarify their own views in relation to the spiritual dimension of childhood. The authors advocate journey rather than development as a preferred metaphor. They argue for the recognition of the term ‘dimension’ in spiritual and other development as it resists the notion of prescriptive stages or targets. Building on the work of Hay and Nye (2006) this book sees nurturing spirituality as about releasing rather than directing children’s understanding and imagination. “Adults can choose to impose socially and historically developed norms, or they can allow children a free space to express themselves” (Adams et. al., 2008, p. 46).

Dr Sandra Carroll
National School of Religious Education,
Australian Catholic University


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**References**


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At the time of European settlement in Australia, one could have categorically assumed that one’s neighbour would have held fairly similar religious beliefs to one’s own. In 1901 Australians were predominantly Anglo-Celtic, with only 1% of the population professing non-Christian religions (ABS, 2006). Today, Australian society proclaims a myriad of religious traditions. Australia’s current census data indicates that non-Christian religions are growing at the fastest rate (ABS, 2006). Despite popular belief that the majority of Australians are no longer religious, the latest census data reveals that 70% of Australians declared religious affiliations (ABS, 2006). Myer Bloom took to the streets to find out ‘what ordinary people believe’ and recorded his findings in his book Does God Live in the Suburbs?

Bloom completed his book in his spare time over a number of years. Each of the twenty three chapters explores a different religious tradition as experienced by a practicing member. Not often does one find insights into so many religious traditions within the confines of two covers. For the average Australian, wanting to get a glimpse into how other Australians celebrate their own religiosity, Does God live in the Suburbs? is a worthy point of reference. This book successfully debunks some common misconceptions and stereotypes about varied religious groups.

Bloom chose to interview ‘average Australians’ rather than clerics, theologians or a professional expert to ensure that the reader is given a picture of what the common practitioner of each religious group believes. Does God Live in the Suburbs? certainly gives a succinct account of the basic values and beliefs underpinning each of the faith traditions explored. However, it is important that the reader bears in mind that each of the religious accounts in this book is personalized, and as such, the information is not necessarily indicative of what all members of these faith traditions believe. Bloom makes it clear in his notes on methodology, that each of the interviewees speaks only of their individual experience of their faith, and that their views may differ from that of the official authorities of their religious tradition. Bloom acknowledges that each of the chapters “serves as an introduction to a particular faith and raises questions for further exploration” (p. xii).

The contents of this book could certainly not be a guide to the fundamental beliefs of the particular traditions explored; in fact one cannot help but question how indicative the point of view of one individual can be of an entire group. Nevertheless, the book certainly sparks an intellectual inquiry about the ‘nitty-gritty’ of these faith traditions, which if nothing else is a positive aspect. It is pertinent that one follows Bloom’s advice, and uses the information gained simply to add to ones repertoire of information on various religions.

As a religious educator in a Catholic school, I thought I had a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the faith traditions common to the majority of Australians. However, Does God Love in the Suburbs? introduced me to many beliefs of which I was unaware, and highlighted my ignorance of various traditions. A book such as this may prove to be a valuable resource for educators working in multi-cultural schools. Just recently, we enrolled a young Hare Krishna girl into our school community. This young lady refused to eat in class with the other students, and indicated that she was embarrassed because her food was ‘different’. Having little or no knowledge of the Krishna tradition her class teacher was unsure of the relevance of this young girl eating habits to her religious practice. Having recently read Does God Live in the Suburbs? I was able to explain the necessity for Hare Krishna’s to offer their food to Krishna before eating, and their strict adherence to a vegetarian and lacto-vegetarian diet. I explained that Hare Krishna’s do not eat meat or eggs because of the violence involved in the killing of an animal, and their belief in re-incarnation suggests to them that an animal that has prematurely died will need to be reborn to complete that interrupted life. Whilst my colleague was very impressed with my knowledge of Hare Krishna eating habits, I did have to quickly add “don’t quote me on that” as I am still mindful that some of the information I received from Does God Live in the Suburbs? may differ from that of the official authorities of their faith (Bloom, 2007, xiii).

Does God Live in the Suburbs? is an easy read that offers a glimpse into a number of religions that are common to multicultural Australia. It would certainly be a valuable reference for religious educators. However, it is important that the reader approaches this book with a critical mind.

Lisa Leening
Galilee Regional Catholic School, South Melbourne
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Articles on the following are welcomed:
- religious education in various contexts;
- the religious needs of young adults in the immediate post-school period;
- various models of faith communities in which evangelisation and catechesis may take place besides the Catholic school;
- religious education of children and adolescents;
- continuing religious education for adults;
- family ministry and youth ministry.

All articles submitted should be between 3000-5000 words in length and prefaced, on a separate page by an abstract of no more than 150 words. Please submit your article electronically as a Word attachment to EditorJRE@aquinas.acu.edu.au. A COVER sheet should contain the title of the paper, author’s name, brief biographical details, institutional affiliation, postal address, phone, fax, email address, where available. Authors will receive a copy of the issue of the journal in which their contribution appears.

Contributions on the following are welcomed:
- Ideas for Practitioners
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- Research
- Conferences
- Notes on Resources
- Correspondence – relevant to topics discussed in the journal
- Current Issues

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An annual index is included in issue four of each volume. The journal is currently indexed in: APAIS, AUSTROM, Australasian Religion Index, Journals in Religious Education and DEST Register of Refereed Journals.

JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION is published four times each year by:
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY PO BOX 256 DICKSON ACT 2602 AUSTRALIA
YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION: $45.00 (Aust.) $50 (Overseas) ABN 15 050 192 660
ISSN 1442-018X

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Print Post Approved: PP2141613/00105